PILLARS OF COMMUNITY

Why communities matter
and what matters to them

June 2021

CSJ The Centre for
Social Justice

Contents

About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five 'pathways to poverty', first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report *Breakthrough Britain*. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises and other grass-roots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2021 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

Acknowledgements

From NatWest Group

NatWest Group aims to champion the potential of the people, families and businesses it serves in communities across the UK. The CEO Alison Rose announced her strategy in February last year focussing on tackling climate change, building financial confidence and supporting enterprise. As a relationship bank in a digital world, NatWest Group believes a reciprocal relationship with society will deliver a purpose led strategy and deepen relationships with communities across the UK.

While NatWest Group has partnered with the CSJ to undertake this research, the policy recommendations contained in this report are from the perspective of the Centre for Social Justice and may not be fully reflective of NatWest Group's wider position.

Foreword

Our mission at the Centre for Social Justice is to tackle poverty.

Through close relationships with frontline workers and charities, our distinctive approach focuses on addressing five 'pathways' to poverty – root causes of hardship and entrenched social disadvantage. These include family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, addiction, and problem debt. The sense that one's local community is 'left behind' makes these worse.

One of the key lessons we learn, time and again, from our Alliance of partner charities is the importance of trusting relationships in supporting those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. Trust takes time to build and is easily lost. In addition, we regularly hear that loneliness and relationship breakdown make getting out of poverty more challenging. These issues have only become exacerbated and more urgent during the pandemic.

More positively, however, I know from the personal experience of running a charity the strong sense of fulfilment that can come from serving in the community – be it through volunteering for a sports club, offering debt advice, or just being there for your neighbours.

'Purposeful participation' in the community – as we argued in our *Community Capital* report – is an immensely rewarding aspect of a flourishing life.

This report points out that to enable community relationships to thrive, we need to develop pathways to participation. These include the foundational aspects of security (both socioeconomic and neighbourhood safety), connection (both with family members and other residents) and belonging (having agency and a sense of place).

Three aspects of the data stand out to me. Firstly, it shows clearly that we have major issues to address in tackling in loneliness, access to support services, neighbourhood security and thriving high streets.

Secondly, it also shows that factors enabling people to develop roots in a place are crucial for a flourishing community – such as jobs, strong housing tenure, strong relationships, and more. To address these, we need to be attentive to the distinctive needs of geographic areas (such as deprived areas of major cities) and demographic groups (such as younger and older people).

Thirdly, it shows that each sector has a distinctive role to play – yes, government policy at every level is vital, but so too must we champion the role of charities, volunteer groups and businesses in strengthening communities. Likewise, we can each make a positive difference in our own communities as individuals!

As we emerge from the pandemic, the temptation will be to forget some of the community spirit that has drawn us together over the last year. Instead, we must now double down to strengthen communities across the country.

The Government can take the lead on this by putting community relationships at the centre of its levelling up agenda.

To do this, they should take forward recommendations in this report including developing more Family Hubs, rolling out Universal Support, enabling mentorship schemes, strengthening housing tenure, extending the school day, commissioning social work from local organisations, and rejuvenating high streets into 'hub streets' as flourishing centres for our communities.

More broadly, this report offers a framework for thinking about community and practical recommendations for each sector. We hope it will make for valuable reading beyond simply government policy circles.

Poverty matters. So does community. By strengthening communities through creating pathways to participation, we can mitigate poverty and disadvantage across the UK and tackle long-standing issues of social isolation.

We must seize this opportunity to level-up our communities for the years to come.

Andy Cook
CEO of the Centre for Social Justice

Executive summary

The community deficit: The state of community in the UK

There is widespread concern about the decline in local community life in the UK over recent generations.[1] This is a problem because, as our research shows, people look to their local communities for three things, or 'pillars' of community: a sense of security, human connections and a feeling of belonging. This decline in community manifests itself in experiences of loneliness, insecurity, and feeling 'left behind'. Social isolation is linked to poor mental and physical health, making it harder to lead a flourishing life.

The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated many of these problems and caused disproportionate hardship among many of the least well-off in our society.[2] And yet, the onset of lockdown saw an outpouring of community spirit and localism which many see as an opportunity to rebuild our social fabric.[3]

This report investigates how to enable communities to thrive by strengthening each pillar of local community; security, connection, and belonging.

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1. The 2015 studies by the Centre for Social Investigation at Nuffield College offer a nuanced picture on social capital, showing that whilst not all forms of social capital have declined, and not all declines have occurred uniformly across society, forms of social capital associated with civic participation do appear to be declining: "Activity with voluntary organisations relating specifically to the local community or neighbourhood is in decline, falling from 11.5% to 7.8% over the last decade" (p.1) and "Activity with voluntary organisations (or 'civic participation') appears to be in long-term slow decline" Centre for Social Investigation, 'CSI 8: Social Capital – Are We Becoming Lonelier and Less Civic?', 1. The decline in volunteering, as reported by the ONS, between 2012 and 2015 shows a gradual decline in volunteering time, amounting to a loss of more than £1 billion to the UK economy Office for National Statistics, 'Billion Pound Loss in Volunteering Effort', Office for National Statistics, 16 March 2017, www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/billionpoundlossinvolunteeringeffort/2017-03-16. The organisation *The New Local* calls for a 'community paradigm' in public service provision which is needed to supplant the state-centric and market-centric paradigms Lent and Studdert, 'The Community Paradigm'. The importance of community as a source of social provision is echoed in the work of thought leaders from a wide range of political perspectives including as Robert PutnamPutnam, *Bowling Alone*; Putnam and Garrett, *The Upswing: How We Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again.*, Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* and Hilary Cottam, *Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationships between Us and Revolutionise the Welfare State*. Danny Kruger's recent *Levelling Up Our Communities* report also echoes this, and highlights a wide range of areas of concern, including regional inequality, the decline of high streets and other community assets such as pub, libraries, and post offices: Kruger MP, 'Levelling up Our Communities: Proposals for a New Social Covenant', pp.11–12. From the Centre for Social Justice, see our report, *Community Capital* Centre for Social Justice and Sinclair, 'Community Capital: How Purposeful Participation Empowers Humans to Flourish'

2. See, for example, the CSJ's report *The Great Recovery* for a summary of key social issues caused by the pandemic and disparities in their effects on different social groups, especially those who are unemployed and/or vulnerable. Centre for Social Justice, 'The Great Recovery: A Post Covid-19 Deal for Britain'

3. The public sentiment expressed in the increase of 'mutual aid' groups and initiatives such as 'Clap for Carers' is well known. The *Economics Observatory* notes that the voluntary work undertaken during the pandemic is considerable: "It is estimated that ten million adults in the UK have volunteered for community activities or organisations for, on average, three hours per week. This would be equivalent to approximately £400 million worth of labour at the median UK wage". Macdonald, 'How Has Coronavirus Affected Social Capital in the UK?'

Key findings: Community strength in the UK

We polled 5,000 people to investigate views on what a thriving community means to them and developed an index which estimates the perceived strength of local community life across the UK.

- Strengthening local communities is a highly unifying political agenda, with strong support across the spectrum. This cuts across divisions of party affiliation and the Brexit vote.

- Community and affluence are not the same; income levels are a very poor predictor of community strength according to our index.

- The strength of perceived local community differs across the UK, with many inner-city urban centres including London having among the lowest levels. Areas with stronger index scores were mixed, and included affluent semi-rural areas as well as areas with relatively high levels of deprivation such as in the North West and the Welsh Valleys.

- Factors indicative of stability are good indicators of community strength, such as housing tenure, employment, and social relationships. Areas with older populations also tended to have stronger scores. Areas with younger and more mobile populations tended to have weaker perceived levels of community strength.

- All sectors – including public, private, and charitable/voluntary – are seen as holding responsibility for strengthening community life, and having a distinct and critical role to play. In addition, cross-sector collaboration is crucial. Furthermore, all of us – as individuals and families – are seen as having responsibility and the potential for impact as key agents in enabling communities to thrive; everyone can make a positive difference!

Strengthening community: Pathways to participation

Our poll of 5,000 individuals shows that people tend to prioritise issues of security, then connection, then belonging. This appears to reflect a 'hierarchy of needs' in which security acts as a foundation upon which connection and belonging can be established.

- The pathway to security is *stability*. Stability comes from neighbourhood safety as well as social stability in households, including through stable housing tenure, employment, family relationships and social support structures which are grounded in local, caring, interpersonal relationships.

- The pathway to connection is *facility*. This means more than physical infrastructure; it means resources for people to meet one another locally in formal and informal settings such as parks, high streets, community hubs, clubs, pubs. It also means quality information about opportunities to meet and participate together.

- The pathway to belonging is *agency*. This enables communities to take control of their assets and identity so that it meets the needs and aspirations of those who live in them. Vital to this are diverse opportunities for engagement, giving everyone a voice, and enabling a sense of local "place" to flourish through participatory decision-making.

We must also bear in mind the differences in needs and priorities between different groups. For example, as discussed below, younger people may seek community organisations which offer opportunities for personal growth and development, and older groups are more likely to express concerns about loneliness and isolation from others in the community. Community participation can enable everyone opportunities to grow, develop, and thrive in the context of interpersonal relationships.
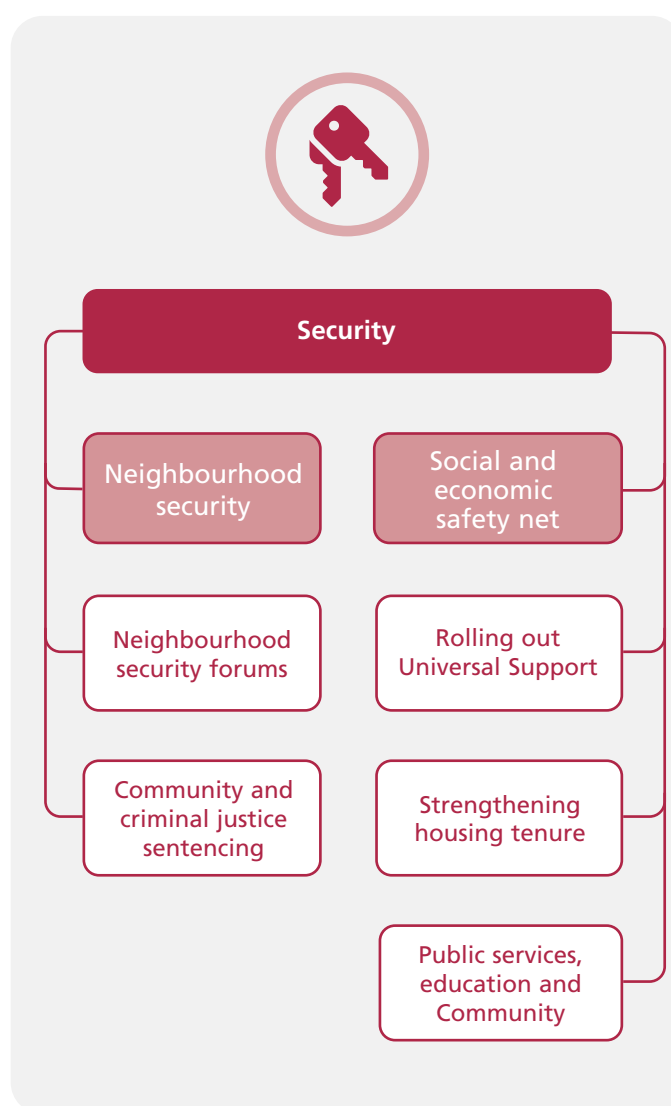
The recommendations of this report are summarised on page 12, and in the charts that follow.

Key recommendations

Enabling security through stability
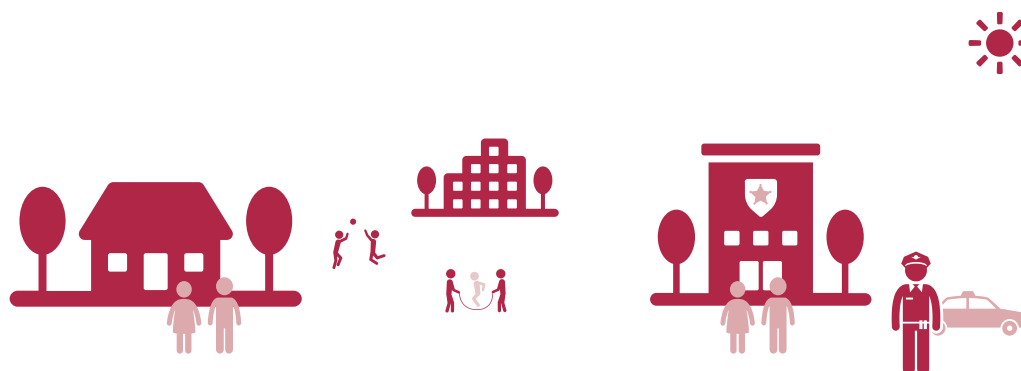
- Whilst security and stability might not be the first factors typically associated with 'community', our research found that they form a foundational pillar for community life.

- In our polling, two of the factors respondents said were most important for having a thriving community were neighbourhood safety and a social safety net, such as having people to turn to if they run into difficulty. Security is thus about more than just neighbourhood safety; it is also about the personal and psychological wellbeing of those in the community.

- We also found a correlations between perceived community strength and factors that are indicative of being able to settle and feel included in a particular place, such as housing tenure, social relationships, and employment.

- Policies in the following areas can help strengthen this foundational pillar, including through strengthening the security of housing tenures, supporting people to strengthen family relationships, and improving neighbourhood security.

Security

- Neighbourhood security
- Social and economic safety net
- Neighbourhood security forums
- Rolling out Universal Support
- Community and criminal justice sentencing
- Strengthening housing tenure
- Public services, education and Community

Enabling connection through social facilities

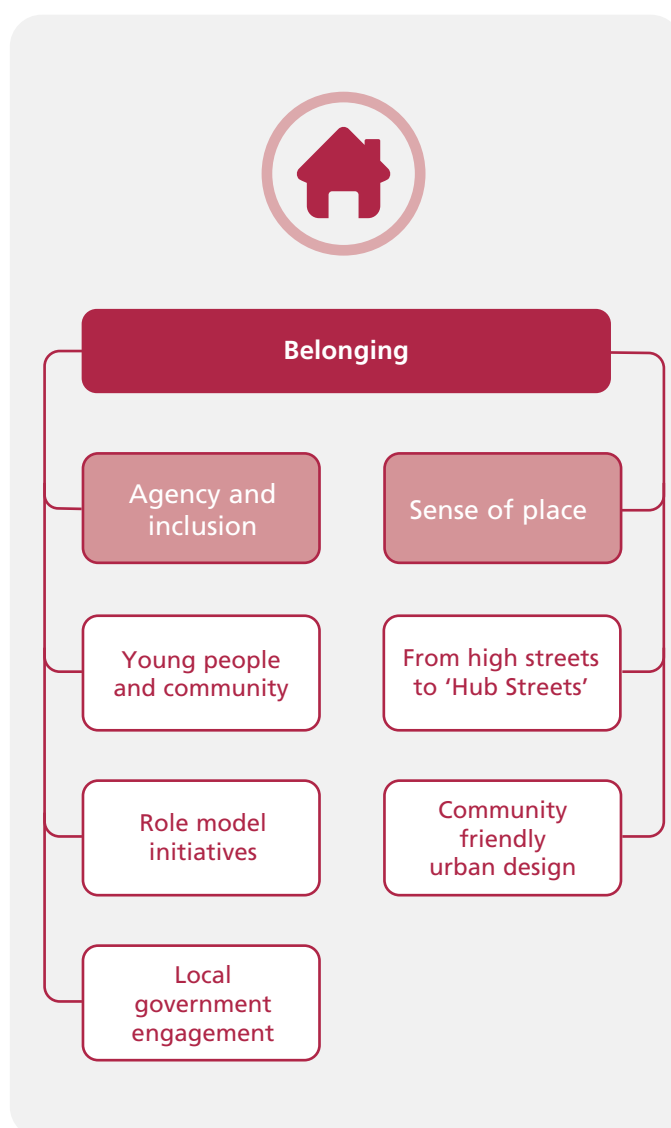- Both security and belonging are vital for community thriving, but trusting relationships are crucial for both. Establishing a social safety net, having opportunities for expression and recreation, as well as the chance to play a part in shaping the place where one lives requires a web of social capital.

- Loneliness is a major issue in the UK today. In our survey, less than 30% of respondents felt that those in their community did not feel lonely or isolated from local people. This is concerning since this is in the top 10 factors people believe make for a strong local community. This is especially important to older age groups.

- The following policies aim to facilitate both bonding (close relationships) and bridging (wider relationships) into communities. Community programmes to help with loneliness are among the 6 most highly prioritised policy areas from those we surveyed. More than half of our respondents felt that Support to help with loneliness or provide other help within the community is a necessary part of community thriving. However, only around a quarter felt that If they have an issue with loneliness, or which the community could help with, it is possible to get help quickly.

Connection

Bonding	Bridging
Family hubs	Commissioning for local relationships
Tackling loneliness	Match trading for social entrepreneurs
	Volunteering infrastructure
	Corporate volunteering
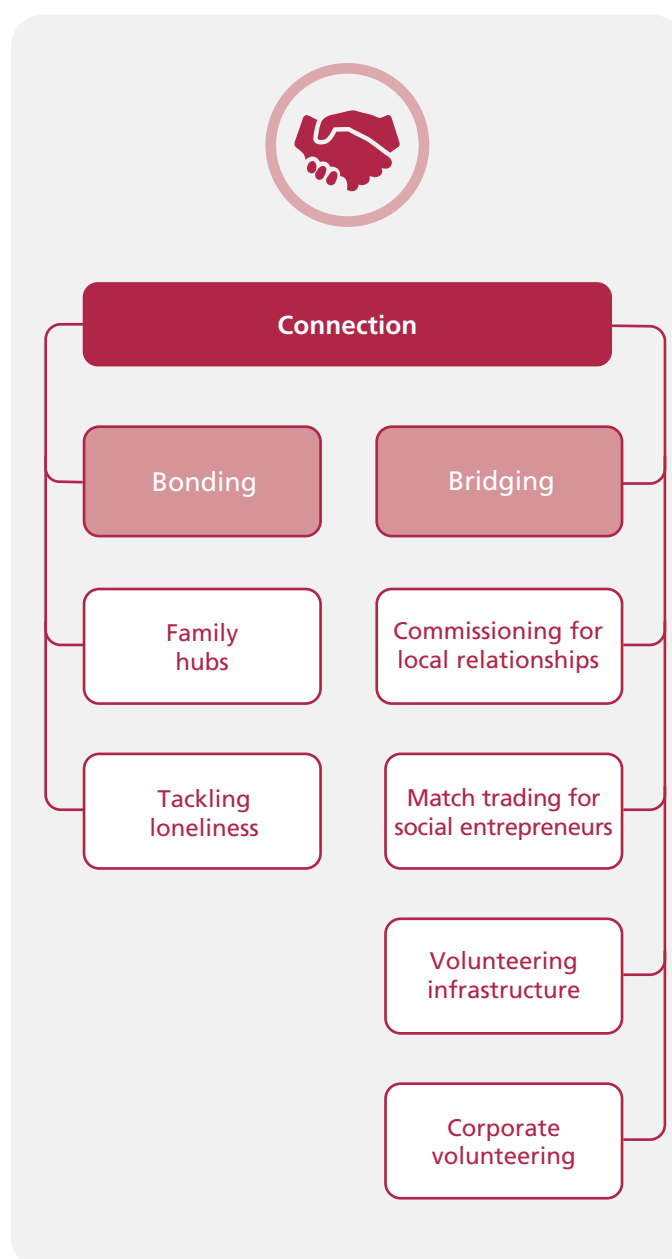
Enabling belonging through agency and place-making

- In an age where we can connect to others across the globe, local-level structures of government and place-making are sometimes seen as insignificant; the pejorative term 'parochial' is derived from the word 'parish'.

- However, among the very top factors and policies that people said matter to them in our poll were 'knowing and feeling welcomed in the local area' and having a 'local government that listens and acts on things that matter to communities'.

- Thus, local government and local organisations can be seen as sites for the development and exercise of agency and empowerment for communities.

Belonging

Agency and inclusion	Sense of place
Young people and community	From high streets to 'Hub Streets'
Role model initiatives	Community friendly urban design
Local government engagement	

List of policy recommendations by sector

Introduction

Discussions about 'community' in the UK today are shaped by two powerful, opposing observations. On one hand, there is the long-standing concern about a 'decline' in community which manifests itself in concerns about factors such as high levels of loneliness, the decline of the high street and stark regional inequalities across the UK. In many ways, these issues have been exacerbated as an inevitable by-product of measures to stop the spread of coronavirus, and the worst effects have been felt by many of the least well-off in society.

On the other hand, the pandemic has ushered in a revival of community spirit and localism. Charities adapted at stunning speed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable around them, whilst countless volunteers gave their time and energy to meet the needs of their local communities.

However, there is no guarantee that this revival will outlast the pandemic. The current agenda to 'level up' the country stands in front of a tremendous opportunity to draw on this spirit and empower communities to provide for the next generations. To learn from the positives of local, social engagement during the pandemic and take them forward as restrictions ease, we must understand what it means to live in a 'thriving community'.

This report aims to contribute to this aspect of public policy thought by offering a framework through which public leaders, policymakers, businesses, charities, and each of us as individuals – in our varied lives as residents, volunteers, voters, employees, and family members – can aim to engage fruitfully as co-constituents of our local communities.

The **first part** of this report examines the meaning of 'community' and why it matters. This powerful term has different meanings in different contexts. However, through our qualitative research it became clear that people think about two broad types; 'local community' and 'communities of interest'. We focus on the former in this report, but, of course, the latter are crucially intertwined in many significant ways at the local level.

The qualitative research enabled us to distil three key pillars that make for a thriving local community: security, connection, and belonging. We break each of these down into component parts. Through a survey of 5,000 respondents, we asked what makes a thriving community, as well as the extent to which people feel their communities are thriving.

The **second part** looks at what matters most to communities. Our findings suggest that the three pillars act as building blocks upon which community is built; security – both socioeconomic and in the neighbourhood – is vital to provide the stability and confidence people need to develop connections at the local level. These connections facilitate opportunities for serving others, enjoying recreation, and feeling a sense of togetherness. These, in turn, provide a platform upon which belonging – place-making, agency, and participatory decision-making – can become established.

In addition, by looking at both the *priority* and *current provision* of each component, we can pinpoint those factors that are highly prioritised but currently perceived as lacking. The specific issues needing urgent attention according to this metric are feeling like people in the area would help when going through a tough time, not feeling lonely or isolated from local people, and the absence of antisocial behaviour.

By examining the data using statistical techniques, we can also estimate the strength of community in different parts of the country – both geographically and demographically. There are positive correlations with factors associated with stability in the community including having strong housing tenure, low unemployment, and social relationships.

We find that local communities are weaker (across the metrics measured in the survey) in major cities, and stronger in many semi-rural areas. We also find that a strong community spirit appears to be present in towns with declined major economies such as mining, manufacturing, and coastal industries – despite relatively high levels of deprivation. We argue that this strong local spirit can be an asset to build upon in addressing issues underlying deprivation – for instance, by commissioning government-funded social support work from local charities who have a strong understanding of specific cultural nuances.

We find that strength in the community correlates with factors enabling people to build stability, put down roots, and establish long-standing community connections. These include stronger housing tenure, low levels of unemployment, and family relationships. These factors are also associated with age, and therefore it is unsurprising that areas with older residents typically have stronger community scores according to our index. Young people, on the other hand, report less satisfaction with community life, and areas with younger people tend to have lower community scores. We emphasise the importance of supporting and enabling younger people – if they wish – to build skills, live in their home area, and maintain local links and relationships. We also look at different demographic groups' respective needs.

Finally, in the **third section**, we examine responsibility for community thriving by sector. Our respondents attributed responsibility to all sectors – public, private, and charitable/voluntary – for playing a part in community thriving. However, this responsibility was assigned for different things. Crucially, respondents felt local government ought to hold strong responsibility, seeing this as the locus for community decision-making. However, they expressed dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of local democracy. Individuals and families were also assigned high levels of responsibility, reminding us all that we can each make a positive difference. Indeed, meaningful relationships are not the kinds of things that can be easily purchased or subsidised. If we – each of us – do not participate in enabling thriving communities, then who will?

Our policy recommendations are interspersed through this report and seek to address these different areas of need. They are by no means exhaustive but provide examples of how we might strengthen communities in practical, tangible ways – including developing declining high streets into 'hub streets', rolling out family hubs, commissioning social work for longstanding relationships, offering mentorship across generations, and making volunteering easier and more effective.

Our aspiration is that the frameworks, data, and policy suggestions will be a useful resource in spurring fresh thinking and action on how to strengthen communities in the years to come.

chapter one

What community means and why it matters

1. Community: Security, connection and belonging

The term "community" is politically evocative, and yet its meaning is not always clear. As one introduction to political philosophy puts it, the word "[…] is warm, caring, and nobody knows what it means".[4] This is not quite right. People do know what it means to them, although different people use it in different ways. Through our qualitative research (described below), we have sought to clarify what people understand by the term 'community' in the UK today. Through this, a conceptual framework has emerged which has enabled us to investigate the policy area in more detail.

We held a series of group discussions with residents of diverse local communities in which several CSJ Alliance charities work (Swansea, Yeovil, Gorton, and Coleraine) as well as stakeholders represented on NatWest Group Regional Boards in Scotland, Wales, and England (North East, North West, Midlands, South West and London & South East). We also spoke with a local community group dedicated to the pandemic response effort in Penmaenmawr (North Wales) and the members of two NatWest-supported Entrepreneur Accellerators which are communities of start-up entrepreneurs (Glasgow and Belfast). We also took the views of several Members of Parliament representing a varied range of local communities and listened to local charity and housing association leaders. These enabled a breadth of people to offer their perspectives on community in a diverse range of places and from a wide range of backgrounds.

From these, several core points emerged. Firstly, participants noted a difference between two kinds of community; *local communities* and *communities of interest*. The former comprise the network and resources of local residents, charitable, public and private sector organisations, political representatives, the built environment, digital resources, culture, heritage, and more, in a local area. The latter comprise networks of individuals and organisations that are built around a common set of specific interests, such as

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4   Swift, *Political Philosophy: A Beginners' Guide for Students and Politicians [Electronic Resource]*, p.221

a professional association, chamber of commerce, religious group, sports or arts club, "friends of…" groups (e.g. of local parks, stations, and other assets) or other kinds of community orientated around a specific interest.[5]

Our focus in this report is on local communities. However, it is clear from our discussions that local communities thrive from a flourishing life of communities of interest within them – such as sports clubs, places of worship, and charities with a specific social mission. These, along with local government, businesses, and the lives of individuals and families contribute to making up a local community, and we address questions related to these where appropriate.

Three themes emerged when we asked what people thought a flourishing community would offer. Whilst many specific factors were discussed, they fell into three broad categories: *belonging*, *connection*, and *security*. These three aspects enable us to build up a broadly accessible and applicable picture of what 'community' means in the UK today.

These three areas are described in more detail in the following sections and diagram.

Figure 1: Key aspects of local community:

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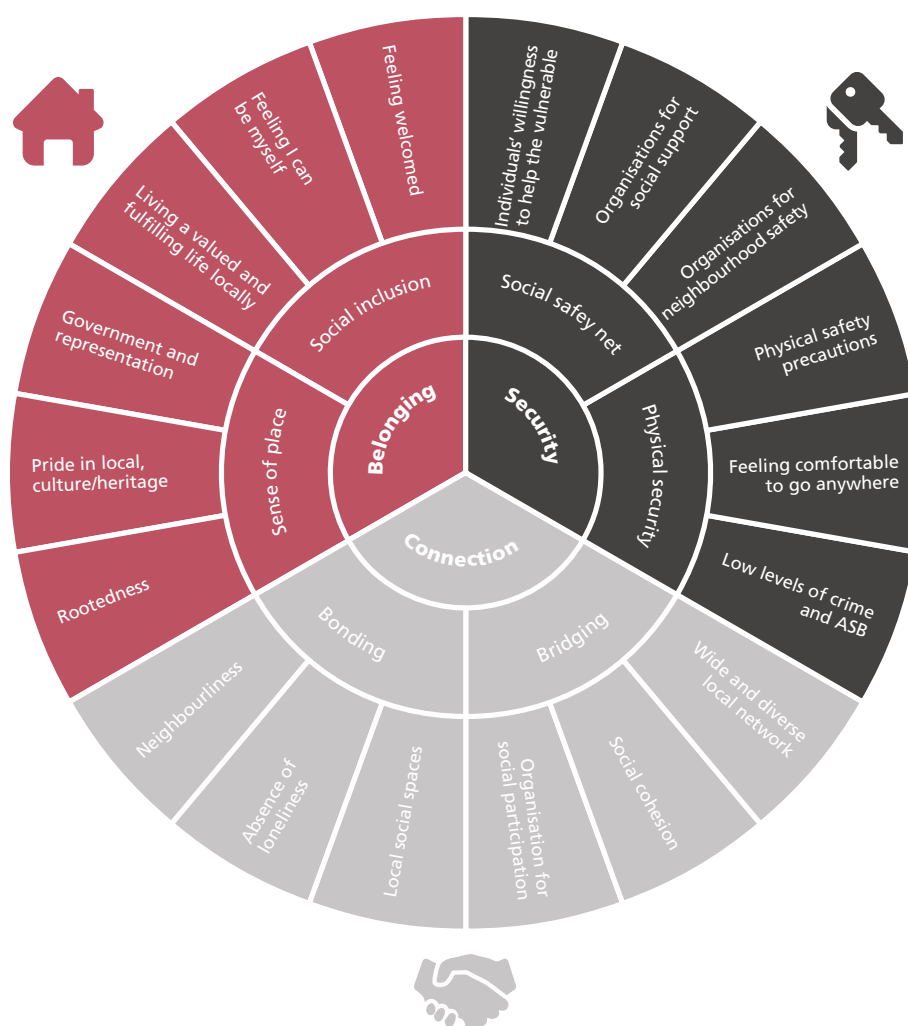
5   This is a conceptual distinction; of course, the two overlap as when communities of interest exist at the local level and play a role in shaping local cultures. For example, a sports team may play a strong role in a town's local identity.

1.1 Security

The first core theme that emerged around discussions of community was security. This includes, but is not limited to, public safety measures – including policing, neighbourhood safety groups, and precautions such as street lighting. It also includes having a social safety net of relationships to depend on in tough times. This means living in a community where others are there to look out for you if life takes a tough turn. Furthermore, it involves the coordinated presence of government bodies, charities and voluntary groups who, together, are well-equipped to support those who are vulnerable both through long-term need and from shocks in life such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, or redundancy.

Many of those we spoke to emphasised the importance of reliable, enduring and trusting relationships to support those in precarious social positions. Such relationships, we heard time and again, are crucial for working through social insecurities from root causes including debt, addiction, and unemployment.

1.2 Connection

This aspect of community refers to the social links between people in their area. Here, we can adopt the vocabulary of 'bonding' and 'bridging' developed in the work of Robert Putnam on 'social capital'.[6] Bonding relationships are closer, such as between close family and friends, whilst bridging relationships are less intimate and provide links to those not in our immediate and close social circles.[7]

Bridging relationships are especially significant in our research as they are the *sine qua non* of a local, civic community. Without bridges between households and close friendship networks, a local area would simply be a collection of private and closed relationships. Bridging relationships, as fostered by civic organisations such as parish councils, recreational groups such as sports clubs, and arts societies, charities and voluntary groups – and even conversations over a shop counter – are crucial to enable people to have a broad range of connections.

These connections are vital, not only to mitigate the experience of loneliness, but also to provide links to opportunities and information both within and beyond the community – such as employment or volunteering openings. Furthermore, these social relationships enable young people to have formative experiences through which they can develop their interests, stretch their minds, develop character, resilience, civic-mindedness and a sense of respect. Social connections are vital for all of these.

1.3 Belonging

This refers to a feeling of being at home in one's community. There are two aspects to belonging. Firstly, the social aspect of feeling welcomed and included in the area. This can mean feeling one is able to live a valued and fulfilling life in the context of the community, that one feels welcome, and can be oneself around others in the area.

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6   Putnam, *Bowling Alone*

7   This is similar to Mark Granovetter's 'The Strength of Weak Ties' which emphasises the importance of such less intimate relationships for community interconnectedness and cohesion. Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties'

Secondly, belonging has a significant cultural aspect which can be described as a 'sense of place'. This includes a feeling of pride in the local area, a connection to the heritage, traditions, and events that shape its culture. These enable a sense of orientation and 'rootedness' in the area.

2. Why community matters

For personal wellbeing and development

- 2.1 million people are projected to suffer from loneliness in the UK by 2030/1.[8]

- Community participation in volunteering is linked to better mental and physical health.[9] Having good neighbourly relations is linked to fostering greater social trust.[10]

- Community relationships and organisations enable opportunities to serve others. This enables people to build skills and character through role modelling, taking initiative, and holding responsibility.[11]

For local agency

- Our data shows a strong tendency to see local-level organisations as responsible for matters affecting their community (see below).

- A majority of the UK public believe there should be "more decision-making powers in the hands of local and regional government".[12]

- In our polling, Local government was in general assigned much higher levels of responsibility for community-related policy than national government which people viewed as principally responsible for things like fiscal policy underlying funding for community projects.

- This appears to track a 'principle of subsidiarity' – that, where feasible, decisions ought to be taken close to those affected by them, and that higher levels of government should support and enable local democratic engagement and participation.[13]

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8   Based on Age UK's projection, itself based on ONS data. Age UK, 'All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life', 5

9   Yeung, Zhang, and Kim, 'Volunteering and Health Benefits in General Adults: Cumulative Effects and Forms. (Report)'. They note that "Research has found that participation in voluntary services is significantly predictive of better mental and physical health [McDougle et al., 'Health Outcomes and Volunteering: The Moderating Role of Religiosity'; Piliavin and Siegl, 'Health Benefits of Volunteering in the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study'], life satisfaction [Thoits and Hewitt, 'Volunteer Work and Well-Being'], self-esteem [Thoits and Hewitt; Morrow-Howell et al., 'Effects of Volunteering on the Well-Being of Older Adults'], happiness [Borgonovi, 'Doing Well by Doing Good. The Relationship between Formal Volunteering and Self-Reported Health and Happiness'; Musick and Wilson, 'Volunteering and Depression: The Role of Psychological and Social Resources in Different Age Groups'], lower depressive symptoms [Morrow-Howell et al., 'Effects of Volunteering on the Well-Being of Older Adults'; Kim and Pai, 'Volunteering and Trajectories of Depression'], psychological distress [Thoits and Hewitt, 'Volunteer Work and Well-Being'; Greenfield and Marks, 'Formal Volunteering as a Protective Factor for Older Adults' Psychological Well-Being'], and mortality and functional inability [Greenfield and Marks. McDougle et al., 'Health Outcomes and Volunteering: The Moderating Role of Religiosity'.]"

10 Li and Pickles, 'Social Capital and Social Trust in Britain'

11 For example, [authors] find that volunteering can improve wage rates and thus can be interpreted as a kind of investment benefit to volunteers, not just those they serve.Hackl, Halla, and Pruckner, 'Volunteering and Income – The Fallacy of the Good Samaritan?' Volunteering has also been seen as key for developing 'soft skills'. Khasanzyanova, 'How Volunteering Helps Students to Develop Soft Skills'

12 Dinic and YouGov, 'Democracy and British Parliamentarianism'

13 For a helpful discussion of the concept of subsidiarity, see Cahill, 'Theorizing Subsidiarity: Towards an Ontology-Sensitive Approach'

For local place-making

- The Social Mobility Commission demonstrates that those who stay close to their hometowns tend to enjoy strong local community connections[14]

- However, those who stay in more deprived areas tend to have less access to employment, educational opportunities, healthcare, and social activities.[15]

- By strengthening local community, we can enable people to have the best of both worlds; continued social connection and quality access to opportunity.

- This involves local place-making,[16] enabling a sense of local identity to play a role in making neighbourhoods attractive to live in and lead a fulfilling life. This can be reflected in local cultural initiatives, the built environment, and enabling places to be socially and economically secure.

3. Community and the coronavirus pandemic

The pandemic has renewed community spirit across the UK

- Many people have witnessed a renewed community spirit during the pandemic, shown through compassionate acts of kindness widely reported on over the last year.

- For example, as research by The New Local shows, thousands of new Mutual Aid groups have formed to support communities through lockdown.[17]

- We need to build on this momentum to continue strengthening community life across the UK.

The pandemic has impacted and shown the importance of social infrastructure

- As Nuffield Foundation research shows, "Local areas that invested in social cohesion programmes are faring better in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic."[18]

- This includes greater social relationships during the lockdowns, attitudes to immigrants, levels of trust, and engagement in social activism.[19]

- The challenges created by lockdown, such as loneliness and exacerbated social issues, have reminded everyone of the importance of social relationships.

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14 Papoutsaki et al., 'Moving out to Move on Understanding the Link between Migration, Disadvantage and Social Mobility', p.8
15 Papoutsaki et al., p.8
16 Papoutsaki et al., p.10
17 Tiratelli and Kaye, 'Communities vs Coronavirus: The Rise of Mutual Aid', p.7
18 Abrams et al., 'The Social Cohesion Investment: Local Areas That Invested in Social Cohesion Programmes Are Faring Better in the Midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic', p.1
19 Abrams et al., p.10

- Coronavirus has accelerated changes in patterns of work. Whilst the continued possibility of remote working varies widely by sector, recent McKinsey research shows that the UK has markedly potential for future remote work among advanced economies.[20]

- Our dataset shows that as a result of covid, people have spent more time in their local area and, whatever the future holds, they intend to continue using local businesses and trades more than they did beforehand.

- This may mean that there is an opportunity for remote working to enjoy more prosperity and cohesion as more residents spend more time and income in their local areas.

4. Community, poverty, and social justice

Many root causes of poverty have been exacerbated by COVID

- The CSJ approaches social justice by seeking to address root causes of poverty. These are often complex and overlapping, requiring specialist support.

- Many root causes of poverty have been exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic.

- As our recent report *The Great Recovery* demonstrates, this includes disruption in education, an uncertain job market, increases in addiction relapses, poorer conditions in prisons, and hampered capacity in providing family support services and tackling issues such as modern slavery.[21]

Trusting relationships are vital for reducing poverty

- Time and again, we hear from the CSJ Alliance charities that providing support to those who are vulnerable and in poverty must be embedded in trusting social relationships.

- This means organising support provision so that those who need help have someone they trust and can turn to on an ongoing basis, and who is equipped to understand a wide range of issues they may be facing simultaneously.

- This theme is broadly reflected in the work of Hilary Cottam who has emphasised convincingly that improving the welfare state necessitates remaking and rejuvenating such relationships as part of our social fabric.[22]

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20   Lund, Madgavkar, and Manyika, 'What's next for Remote Work: An Analysis of 2,000 Tasks, 800 Jobs, and Nine Countries', fig. Exhibits 3 & 4
21   Centre for Social Justice, 'The Great Recovery: A Post Covid-19 Deal for Britain'
22   Cottam, *Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationships between Us and Revolutionise the Welfare State*, e.g. pp.42–44, 270, §3.1.3

Enabling trusting relationships means supporting charities and organisations, especially local ones

- As recent research has shown, many small, local charities and social enterprises understand the specific cultural and social nuances in their areas.[23] They are also particularly well equipped to enable and foster longer-term relationships with those they support.[24]

- However, our work with Alliance charities has shown us that since they are often small, they are likely to have less capacity for meeting bureaucratic requirements and applying to provide social services through publicly-funded commissions.

- At the CSJ, we seek to encourage and support such organisations through policy research and government engagement. Community is at the heart of preventing poverty, and this report seeks to show how all sectors can play a role in strengthening communities across the UK.

5. Measuring community

Drawing upon our qualitative research, we developed a UK-wide survey of 5,000 participants to gain a wealth of quantitative polling data on community life in the UK.

The first part of the survey examined core aspects of security, connection, and belonging in communities (23 factors in total, see Appendix A). This enabled us to assess which elements of these aspects matter most, and the extent to which they feel they are present and/or have been lost in recent years. In addition, we asked respondents which sectors (listed below) should carry responsibility for ensuring community flourishing in each aspect of security, connection, and belonging. The sectors were broken down into the following categories:

- Individuals
- Families
- Voluntary groups and charities
- Local government
- Regional government
- National government
- Businesses
- Banks
- None of these

The second part of the survey examined a wide range of policies and policy goals which can promote community flourishing (29 in total, see Appendix B). We asked which of these respondents considered are necessary for communities to thrive and which were currently present in respondents' communities. These included policies relating to:

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23 Dayson, Baker, and Rees, 'The Value of Small: In-Depth Research into the Distinctive Contribution, Value and Experiences of Small and Medium-Sized Charities in England and Wales'
24 Dayson, Baker, and Rees

- Places and facilities (e.g. transport, parks, libraries, pubs)
- Community organisation (e.g. public servants, leaders, local democracy)
- Information (e.g. for volunteering opportunities and council contacts)
- The role of business (e.g. the high street and entrepreneur support)
- Funding (e.g. government funds, fiscal incentives, and support from banks)
- Voluntary & Charity Groups (e.g. supporting the vulnerable and for recreation)

Building on this, we asked which sector(s) people feel are responsible for taking forward each of these policy areas for their local community using the same categories as above. We also used a 'maxdiff' analysis which enables us to identify how people prioritise all of the factors and policies.

The third part of the survey briefly examined a small set of questions about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on communities. We asked whether residents:

- have spent more time in their local area because of the pandemic
- have used local trades, businesses, and services more
- intend to continue doing this in the future

In addition to these aspects, we also collected data to enable segmentation analyses across a wide range of demographic, geographic, and political factors. Using Multilevel Regression and Poststratification (MRP) techniques, we have created models which estimate response patterns across the country at the constituency and local level. Whilst this is an estimation technique only, it does enable us to have a reasonable overview of macro-level trends.

chapter two
What matters to communities

1. A hierarchy of community needs

The first major finding from our survey data is that respondents prioritised the three aspects of community in a clear preference order: firstly security, secondly connection, and finally belonging.

We asked people to choose between randomly selected pairs of 23 factors that make for strong communities. Eight of these relate to security, eight relate to connection, and seven relate to belonging. The aggregate results of this enabled us to see how they were prioritised overall in a highly granular way.

The findings are clear. Almost all of the factors relating to **security** came at the very top of the list:

- 1st Living in a low crime area
- 2nd Feeling comfortable to be or go anywhere in the community
- 3rd The absence of antisocial behaviour
- 4th People looking out for and helping each other, even if they don't know each other well
- 6th The importance of safety precautions like well-lit streets
- 9th Feeling like people in my area would help me if I was going through a tough time

Next comes **connection**, with three factors in the top 10:

- 5th People being willing to help each other with different issues
- 7th People checking in on their neighbours
- 10th Not feeling lonely or isolated from local people

Finally, **belonging** was not as strongly prioritised as compared to connection and security, with just one factor in the top 10: knowing and feeling welcomed in the local area (8th). However, below the top 10, the factors are more mixed, with belonging and connection carrying similar weight. This does *not* mean that belonging doesn't matter. We know from qualitative research that all of these factors are important. Rather, it tells us what is most highly prioritised *among an already refined set of significant factors*.

What does this tell us?

The clear message is that there is a hierarchy of factors which are necessary for strong communities. Safety and security comes first and would appear to be perceived – understandably – as a foundation upon which community relationships flourish. Next comes the human need for contact with others, and not feeling isolated or lonely from those in one's area. Finally, the culturally expressive aspects of belonging can flourish in areas which are safe and have good networks of social connection.

Belonging

Connection

Security

Crucially, this tells us that issues related to safety, law, and order are foundational to community thriving. Whilst these issues are not typically considered as central to community policy, our data clearly shows that they matter deeply to the public and should be considered as such.

Finally, by demonstrating these factors to be in a hierarchical order of preference, we do not mean in any way to suggest that they are causally or socially discrete and isolated phenomena. There are many cases where connection and belonging are also central to community safety. For example, if people are to enjoy a social support network of relationships that will assist them in difficult times, this clearly requires opportunities for connecting with others in the community. To take another example, a root cause of gang membership has been linked to the human need for belonging and connection. Providing healthy sources of belonging and connection as alternatives in the community can therefore be vital to reducing crime and promoting neighbourhood security. As we discuss below, many social security issues – such as addiction, unmanageable debt, poor health, educational failure, and much else cannot be addressed effectively without trusting relationships.

Policy area: Neighbourhood Security Forums

We recommend that a regular open forum is made available, for example in a local school or fire station, for representatives from local public services and groups such as police, fire, schools, health providers, youth services, charities, voluntary groups, and so forth. This will provide an opportunity for residents to have their voice heard and help resolve any frustration on the part of residents that their concerns are not being taken on board, for example, of ongoing anti-social behaviour. This should engender a sense of responsibility and accountability to work together to resolve challenges relating to community security, and no-doubt these meetings will capture the attention of the local press. There will need to be an allocation and acceptance of responsibility for ensuring these happen among appropriate local actors.
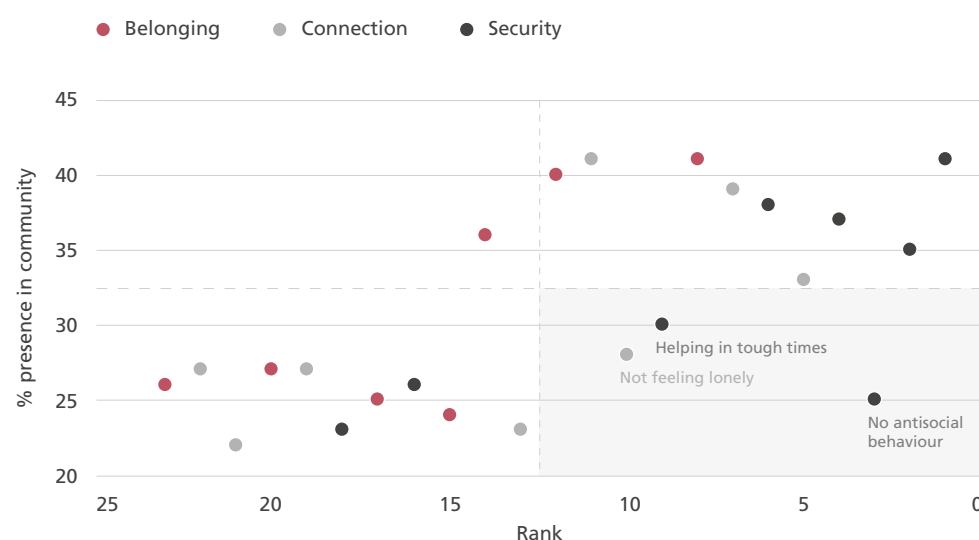
2. Provision and priority of community factors and policies

Whilst the factors cited above are all highly prioritised, policymakers must also consider the extent to which these factors are present in communities. Many factors that the public strongly prioritise will already be supported by robust public provision. Our data analysis enabled us to identify those factors which are strongly prioritised, but not sufficiently present in communities according to public opinion.

The following chart shows the relative importance and perceived presence of each key factor in the community:

Figure 2: Factors contributing to community (presence and ranked importance)

Q: Which of these factors, if any, would you say your community has right now?

Looking at the lower right quadrant gives us a good indication of **high priority factors** that people both **value highly** and **feel their communities lack**.

As can be seen, the overall perceived presence of these community strength indicators is not, in general, particularly high. No factor exceeds 41% average perceived presence in the community among respondents (for the full list of factors and policy areas respondents were asked to rank, see Appendices A & B). This would appear to demonstrate a public perception that there is plenty of work to be done in strengthening communities today.

By dividing the results in the way shown, we can identify several factors to prioritise. The lower right quadrant of this graph shows factors which people both value highly and feel their communities lack. They are:

- Feeling like people in my area would help me if I was going through a tough time
- Not feeling lonely or isolated from local people
- The absence of antisocial behaviour

In addition to examining the public's views about what factors make for a thriving community, we also asked what policies people felt would be most helpful. In the same way, we can analyse the results on a scatterplot comparing the perceived presence of policies as compared to their perceived relative importance:

Figure 3: Policies to build community (presence and ranked importance)

Q: Thinking about (places and facilities/the information available/the way your community is organised/the role businesses currently play/the funds available), which of the following statements do you think are currently true of your community?
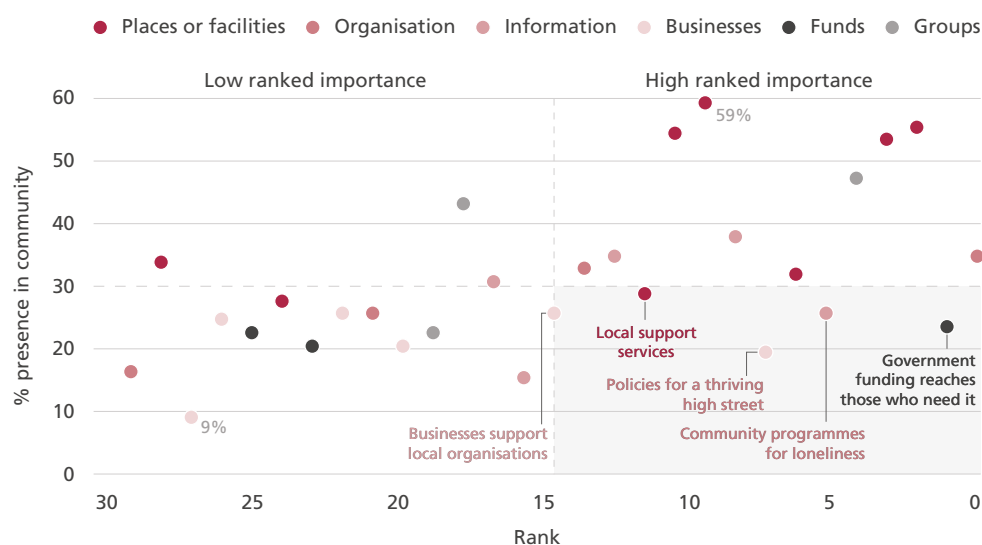
Each of the data points here represents a policy area which may help build community.
These are categorised again, this time into **Places**, **Organisation**, **Information**, **Businesses**, **Funds** and **Groups**.
These are plotted on their **ranked importance** and the **% of respondents** who felt they already exist.
We can see that there is a **greater range of perceptions** for the presence of policies than of factors.

Again, the perceived presence of many policies was not, in general, high. This demonstrates especially salient perceived needs in the four policy areas that were considered to be particularly important but have a low perceived presence. They are:

- Support services for things like parental classes and counselling
- A thriving high street
- Programmes to help with loneliness
- Government funding getting to where it is needed

We return to considering these in the policy recommendations section.

3. The demographics of community: Identifying strengths and removing barriers to community thriving

In addition to polling the public's views of community, our quantitative analysis also enables us to develop a picture of community strength across various demographic groups – including geographic areas and political orientations.

This enables us to identify those areas and factors which correlate with strong communities so that we can aim to develop policies which enable all communities to flourish. In areas where there is less satisfaction with community strength, this helps identify key factors which will be important in removing barriers to community participation.

Furthermore, using survey data, we aim to be attentive to different groups' needs and views on what matters most in community thriving.

Our key findings include:

● Income does not correlate strongly with community strength; there are poorer and wealthier areas with strong and weak communities.

● Whilst there is a fair degree of consistency, some demographic groups – such as younger, older, and black, Asian, and minority ethnic respondents – prioritise somewhat different factors of community thriving.

● The perceived strength of communities is not even across the UK. In particular residents of larger cities are much less satisfied with levels of community connectedness. Some areas that have high levels of deprivation, often with declined major industries, have very high levels of perceived community strength.

● Community strength is much more strongly correlated with factors indicating that people have been able to build stability in life, such as in relationships, housing tenure, and employment. Age is often a strong proxy indicator of such factors, and indeed correlates with the community strength model.

● Overall, there is broadly even support across those from differing political parties and perspectives (such as the Brexit vote) for addressing the community issues described in this report. This suggests that strengthening communities in ways examined through our survey has appeal across contemporary political divides.

The technique used to develop a model of community strength across geographic and demographic dimensions used a multilevel regression and poststratification (MRP) model. This enables an estimate of the strength of community in different Westminster constituencies. MRP is a modelling technique that aims to produce statistically robust estimates for geographic areas from national polls. MRP tries to solve the problem that even very large samples contain very few respondents per area (in this case we used Westminster constituency seats) – for example, a (very large) sample of 30,000 divided by 632 seats would give you less than 50 respondents per seat. MRP works by modelling the relationship between a chosen variable (e.g. voting intention, brand awareness, community strength) and demographics within the sample, then applies this model to the known demographic and political features of each individual constituency.

In practice, this means that estimates for individual seats are not only based on how people from the poll said they feel about their community, it is also based on the relationships between demographics and community strength across the poll. The variable tested in this case was the proportion of individuals who had a 'below average' community score. To test this we calculated a weighted community score per individual, composed of both the number of community factors they had or experienced, weighted by the relative importance of each of those items. Individuals were then marked as having 'below average' community scores if they fell below the mean community score.

The results can be broken down by a range of geographic and demographic factors.

3.1 Geographic factors

Broken down by constituency in England, Wales and Scotland, the map of estimated community strength is as follows:

Figure 4: Map of estimated local community strength by UK parliament constituency
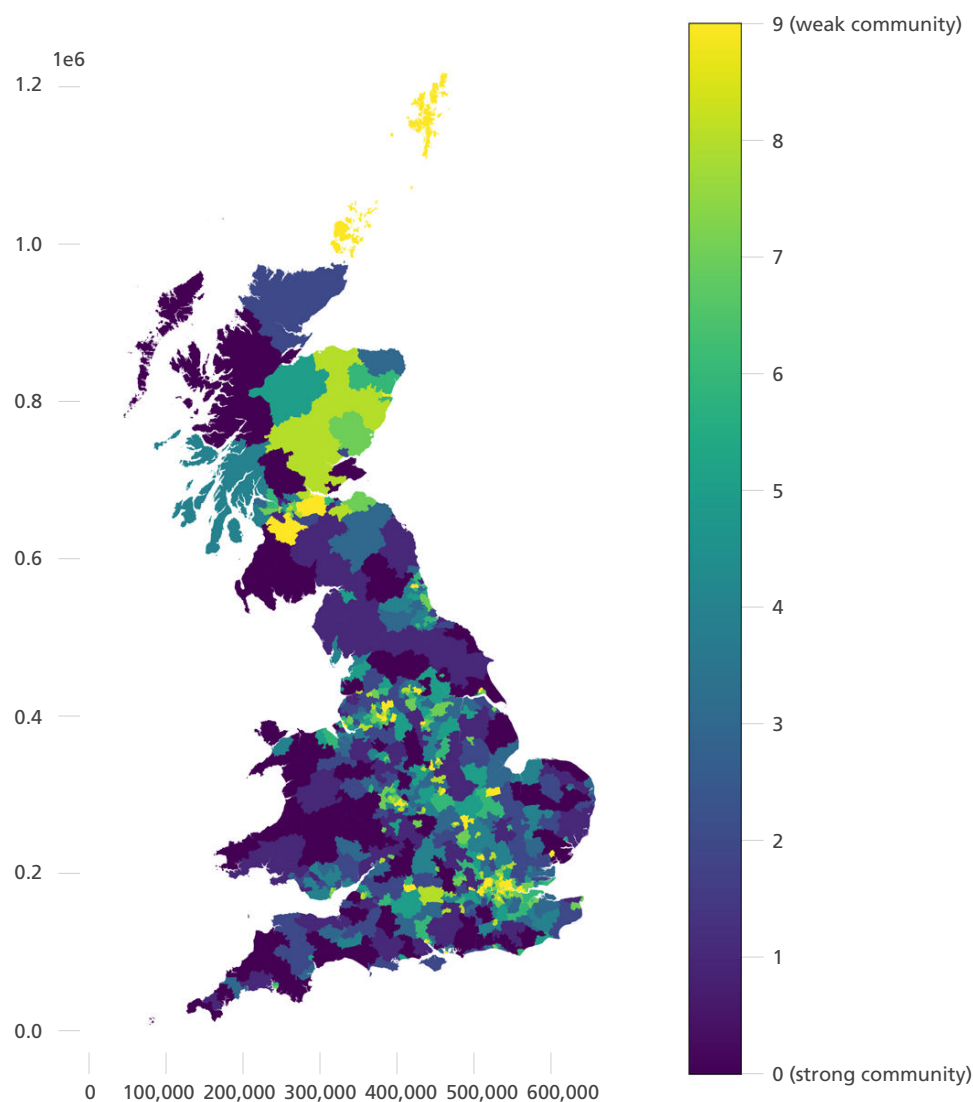
The UK heatmap presents the community index by constituency, with yellow areas showing the weakest percieved community score and purple ares showing the strongest. As can be seen, whilst income correlated very little with community, there are some notable geographic trends.

Major cities

In London, Birmingham, Manchester, and other major cities, residents were more likely to report feeling there is a lack in the strength of their local community. Our qualitative research revealed concerns from London residents about levels of community strength in their area, with highly transient populations and very low levels of, for example, people checking in on neighbours and helping out those they do not know well.

Figure 5: Heatmap of estimated community in across London
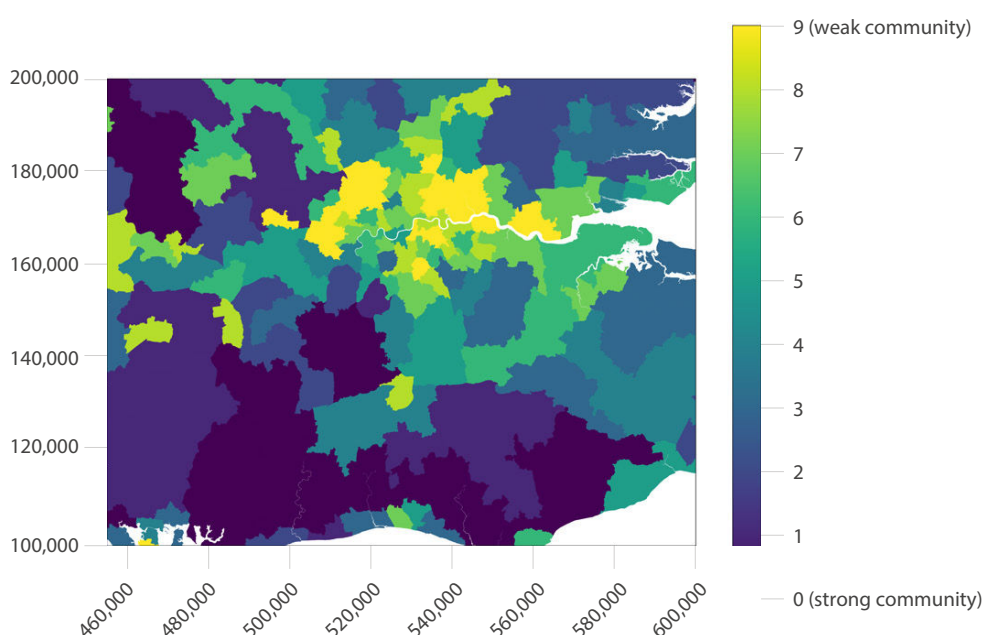
Likewise, within university city wards, we found generally quite low community scores. This is likely related to the phenomenon of very high population transience, and the student residents being connected primarily through their interest networks (the university) rather than the local area.

This result is intuitively plausible since city residents tend to have shorter lengths of residency, are less likely to work in their residential area, and are likely to connect with others across a whole city based on common interests rather than with immediate geographic neighbours.

This is not, necessarily, entirely concerning since many people in cities and university residences may not all wish to have a sense of community built around place. However, we must be mindful that many residents of these areas do live there long-term and will indeed wish for this. They may have seen community networks reduce or even evaporate during their lifetime and residence.

Furthermore, our metrics are based on shortfalls in provision for community weighted by the importance of these factors to respondents. The map of community strength in London is strikingly similar to the map of violent crime produced by The Childhood Trust[25] which they also identified as correlated with poverty. Tackling root causes of poverty and crime through a variety of means in major cities is thus likely to be a vital ingredient in removing barriers that hold back community participation.

Strong communities with weaker economies

Another striking feature of the map is that industrial heartlands – particularly those with historic coal, manufacturing, and coastal (fishing and tourism) economies – report fairly (albeit not extremely) high levels of community strength, whilst also having a relatively high prevalence of deprivation. These include areas such as the Welsh Valleys, parts of the Black Country, and North of England. In many of these areas, despite a decline in industrial economic activity – and associated increases in deprivation – community spirit remains strong.

Figure 6: Welsh Valleys[26]
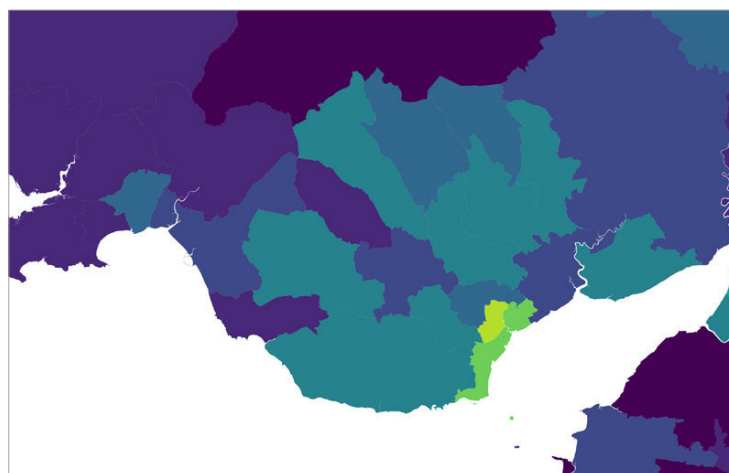
In these areas, we recommend the importance of viewing local interconnectedness, identity, and sense of place as key assets upon which to build in addressing issues of social and economic deprivation. This, crucially, involves engaging local organisations such as charities and social enterprises who have embedded knowledge of these areas in addressing poverty and deprivation issues.

Semi-rural areas with lower housing costs

Among the top 50 constituency areas estimated to have the strongest community scores in our model are many rural and semi-rural places with lower housing costs and somewhat older populations. This is intuitively plausible since older age groups tend to have more time for volunteering and other forms of community participation, and often settle in

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25   Drewett, 'Maps Highlight Shocking Link between Poverty and Violent Crime Wave in London'
26   The notable exception here is the city of Cardiff.

a location for longer periods of time than younger age groups. They are more likely to have accumulated wealth and therefore been able to move to neighbourhoods with factors that correlate with stronger community scores such as lower crime rates.

Residents of these areas are also more likely to enjoy stronger housing tenure – especially where the cost of housing is lower. This is reflected in the fact that the broad regional spread of community strength in the heatmap follows the approximate contours of the map of house prices.[27] Addressing issues in housing are crucial to evening out opportunity for community engagement across the country.

3.2 Demographic factors

We have analysed the community scores by Westminster constituency to look at correlations with a range of demographic factors including income, employment, deprivation, age, housing and marriage. The following scatterplots show which factors are indicative of a higher community score. Demonstrating correlations, of course, does not entitle us to make causal inferences, but it does clearly demonstrate factors which should be of interest to policymakers seeking to strengthen communities, and merit further research.

3.2.1 The role of stability: Income, employment, deprivation

The following scatterplot shows our community strength model scores plotted against constituencies ranked by levels of income.[28]

Figure 7: Constituency income and community strength

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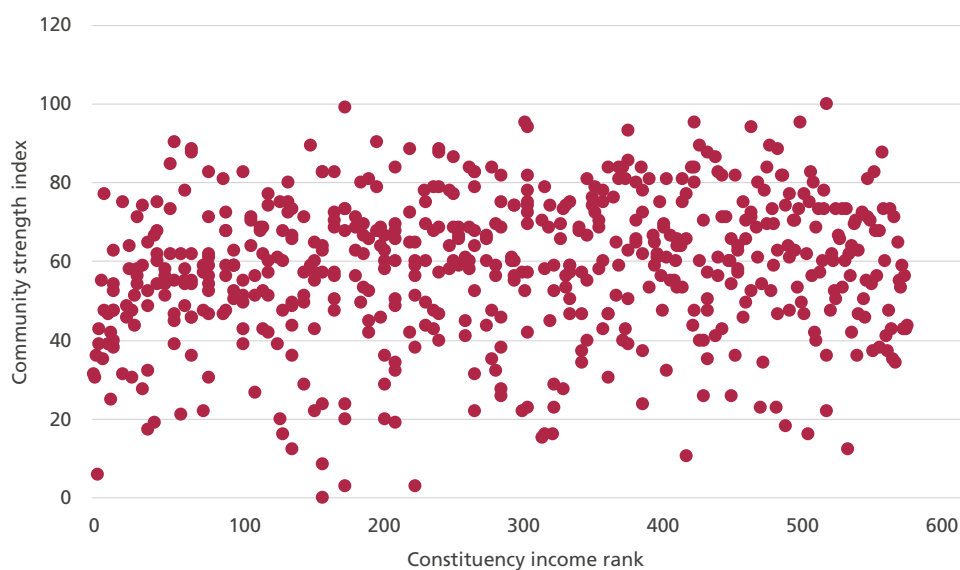
27   See, for example, the price tracking and mapping site *Prime Location* Prime Location, 'Heatmap of UK Property Values'.
28   This, and the following scatterplots, use data from England & Wales constituencies.

As can be seen, this scatterplot indicates that there is negligible correlation between income and community strength. Each dot represents a Westminster constituency in England or Wales. In short, there are both better-off and less well-off constituencies (in terms of income) which have much stronger and much weaker communities.

This corroborates our intuition that income levels are unlikely to be central to community strength, and – as the Wigan example has shown[29] – community participation can greatly improve quality of life without necessarily increasing income and council tax levels.

That said, there are several specific factors which did demonstrate variance with levels of income. Those with the lowest levels of income (up to £20,000 a year) were:

● Least likely to say there is a sense of pride in their local area (32–37%)
● Least likely to say their local area had an identity connected to its heritage and past (25%)
● Least likely to believe that government funding gets to those who need it (22–23%)

Unemployment as a barrier to community thriving
That said, income is just one economic factor. We did find a moderately, but clearly positive, correlation between levels of unemployment and community weakness:

Figure 8: Unemployment and community strength
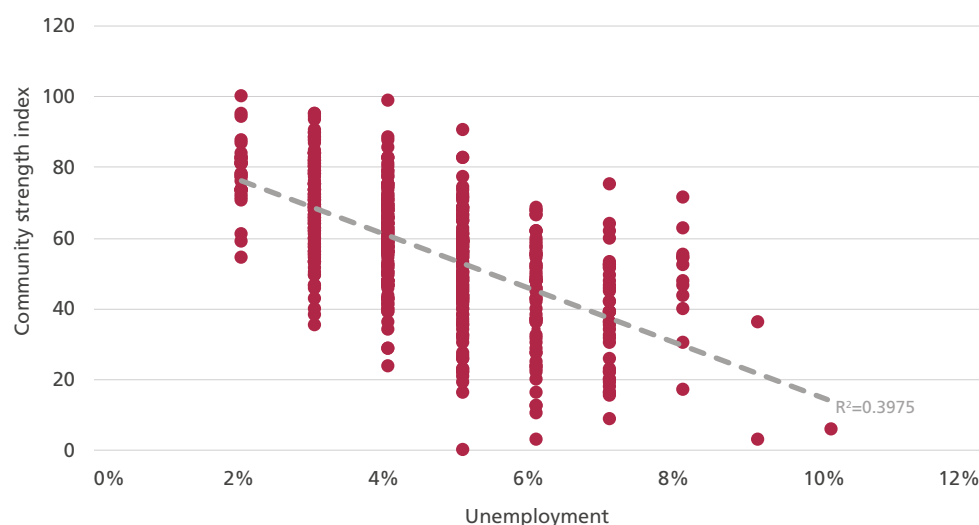
Source: Office for National Statistics; National Records of Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2016): 2011 Census aggregate data. UK Data Service (Edition: June 2016). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5257/census/aggregate-2011-1

A lack of quality work can cause serious stress, heartache, and disruption in people's lives. This, too, can impact communities at a broader scale. As can be seen from the above, low levels of unemployment tend to correlate with community strength, albeit that this correlation is moderate.

29   Naylor and Wellings, 'A Citizen-Led Approach to Health and Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal'

Why would employment levels correlate with stronger communities, whereas income does not? There are many possible answers, but among them are that employment offers stability and a degree of rootedness, and the workplace, too, is a place where local community connections can develop and flourish. Conversely, areas with high unemployment may see higher levels of population turnover, and thus less opportunity for people to develop stability in their place of residence and connection to their community. In addition, unemployment itself can lead to isolation and loneliness.

It is likely that unemployment is a barrier to community thriving and participation. We encourage the rollout of support systems which help people prepare for the workplace and secure employment as a crucial factor for community strengthening.

Policy area: Rolling out Universal Support

Our research shows that community strength is correlated with low unemployment. In addition to income, employment provides a sense of dignity and security for employees and their families which can act as a platform for community participation. The workplace, too, can be a strong element of local community.

That said, finding a job is not always straightforward, especially in the current climate. When job hunting, it can be invaluable to have a community of friends championing one's aspirations. We recommend fully rolling out the long-overdue programme of Universal Support as a complement to the existing welfare system which will support those seeking work.

Universal Support is a personalised, holistic wrap-around support service designed to complement and enhance the system of welfare provision.[30] It focuses on helping people with multiple and complex barriers to employment, such as homelessness, addiction, or criminal activity, and proactively intervenes at the earliest possible stage to provide support for their economic, physical, mental and social wellbeing. A contracted, independent keyworker actively builds a relationship with the person, helping them to identify their goals and develop personalised plans to achieve them. They help the person to access the services they need locally, providing coaching and support until their goals have been achieved.

Deprivation as a barrier to community thriving

In addition to unemployment, areas with higher levels of deprivation also tend to have weaker communities according to our model. This is not a measure of the same thing as income, although income is one factor used in the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The factors include income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services, and the living environment.[31] However, this is not universally true. Some areas with high levels of deprivation have high levels of community strength. The following constituencies have relatively high deprivation levels (more than 60% of the population with more than 1 dimension of deprivation) and also relatively high levels of perceived community strength (<41% weakness score). The vast majority are former industrial heartlands or coastal communities whose key sources of economic prosperity have declined, but haver retained a strong sense of rootedness and belonging.

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30 Centre for Social Justice, 'Unfinished Business: Next Steps for Welfare Reform in Post-Covid Britain'
31 Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 'The English Indices of Deprivation'

Figure 9: Deprivation and community strength
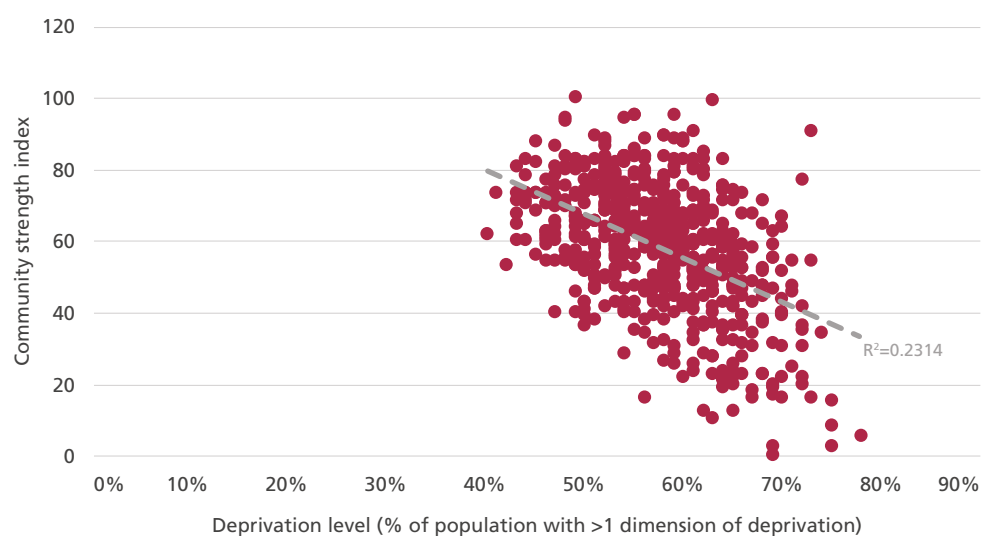
Source: Office for National Statistics; National Records of Scotland ; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2016): 2011 Census aggregate data. UK Data Service (Edition: June 2016). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5257/census/aggregate-2011-1

Policy area: Commissioning for local relationships

Local charities are of inestimable community value, due to their first-hand knowledge of local issues, and their ability to form long term, sustainable relationships with those they support.[32] Additionally, those who volunteer with them enhance their own connections, wellbeing, and sense of worth. These factors build trust which is a vital ingredient in social cohesion and community flourishing.

However, small charities are too often underused, undervalued, and insufficiently supported by local authorities. For example, a micro-grant to a small local charity can have a disproportionate impact on a small local community. Concerns about this issue can be most acutely seen at the commissioning phase when small local charities can be overlooked in favour of larger, more visible national charities and/or service providers, despite having a greater level of knowledge and experience in the local community. This can often be because local charities do not have the capacity (e.g. a communications department or access to a bid writer) to make local authorities aware of their presence and ability. This means they cannot invest as much time as larger charities on writing tender applications for commissions. They may also not be able to deliver at the same scale as larger organisations, despite offering strong, embedded local service provision which may leave a more lasting impact. This should be taken into account.

More research is needed to examine localised, community-oriented commissioning. At this stage, we recommend that local government should introduce a council-level role for a Local Charities Representative, whose sole focus is on building relationships with small community charities and assisting them to maximise service and support opportunities. Furthermore, the commissioning process must place strong weight on the value of local relationships that service contracts create. This will mean that beneficiaries of government services are more likely to build *trust* with providers, having provision for their needs which is sensitive to local issues, and having sustainable relationships with organisations that have an existing presence in their community.

32   This is a theme that repeatedly came up in our own qualitative research with CSJ Alliance Charities and other stakeholders. It is also strongly corroborated by recent research by the Lloyds Bank Foundation who express similar concerns about commissioning processes. Dayson, Baker, and Rees, 'The Value of Small: In-Depth Research into the Distinctive Contribution, Value and Experiences of Small and Medium-Sized Charities in England and Wales'

3.2.2 Enabling roots: Housing and relationships

Insecure housing tenure as a barrier to community thriving

Insecurity of housing tenure can place a strong burden of worry of residents. Facing the possibility of needing to relocate regularly is likely to act as a barrier to putting down roots in the community over a longer period of time for many people. We believe that community participation should be something open to everyone, regardless of their housing tenure type.

The community strength scores for each constituency can be plotted against levels of home-ownership (first chart) and other housing tenure types (second chart).

As can be seen below, areas with more than 40% of the population owning their home outright have stronger communities, and conversely, the weakest communities (with scores over 80 on our index) all have less than 30% levels of outright home ownership.

Those who own their homes outright will be more likely to have lived in an area for a considerable amount of time which provides more opportunity to invest time and energy into community participation. In addition, homeowners have made a material personal investment in a place which could create a significant incentive to participate in and strengthen local community life.

However, this is not the only factor at work; outright home ownership is a highly secure form of tenure which strongly reassures residents that they will be able to have a continued residence in the community if they wish.[33] We believe more can also be done to strengthen the security of tenure for other types of housing tenure such that people can live in rented accommodation with greater reassurance that they will be able to have a continued presence and participation in their community (see policy box).
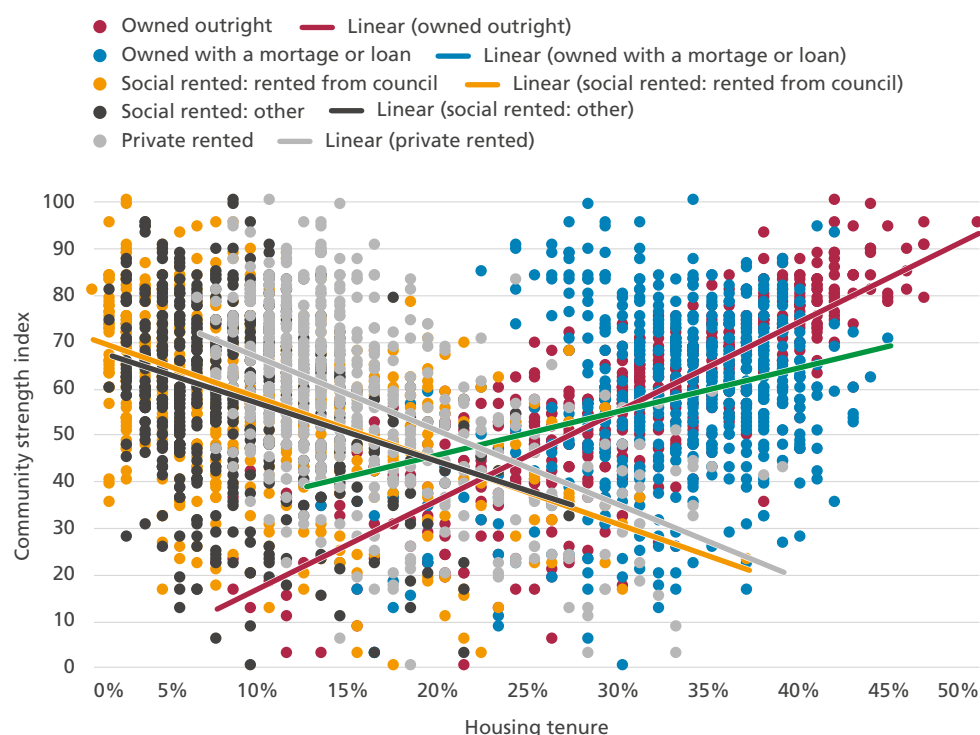
Figure 10: Housing tenure type and community strength
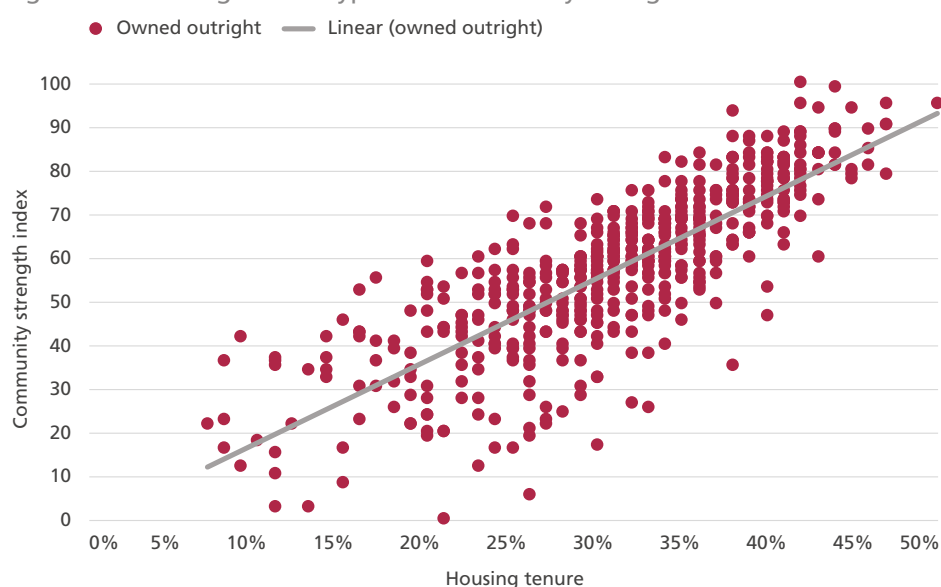
Source: Office for National Statistics; National Records of Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2016): 2011 Census aggregate data. UK Data Service (Edition: June 2016). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5257/census/aggregate-2011-1

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33 As shown in the MHCLG, English Housing Survey 2019–20, 2021, (Annex Table 1.22), the average length of time spent living in a private rented home is four years, compared to 17 years for those who own their home, and 12 years for people living in social rented homes.

Figure 11: Housing tenure type and community strength

Source: Office for National Statistics; National Records of Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2016): 2011 Census aggregate data. UK Data Service (Edition: June 2016). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5257/census/aggregate-2011-1

Policy area: Strengthening private rented sector housing tenure

It is easier to establish roots and participate in the community if one's housing tenure situation is robust. Of course, home ownership is a clear way to do this, and we strongly support measures and financial instruments which make it easier for first time buyers to own homes. This also means building more truly affordable homes.

However, those in the private rented and social housing sectors should also have better security to feel they can participate in community life fully over the longer term, and will not experience disruption and the severance of community ties when contracts change or are ended.

As per our report *Putting Down Roots*,[34] we recommend that the Government extend the Standard Tenancy to 4 years, with the option for renters to leave the tenancy with two months' notice at any point after an initial 6 months. The abolition of Section 21 'no-fault evictions' should be fully completed, and renters should also have the right to make limited cosmetic improvements to their home. The Renters Reform Bill should also introduce a specialist Housing Court to give tenants better reassurance of justice in any housing disputes.

Finally, a new vision for social housing must build upon the innovation already developed by housing associations to develop community support structures for those in social housing and increase the supply of social housing significantly in the coming years. Whilst in recent years much has been done to help reduce homelessness and rough sleeping, we also recommend the adoption of a national Housing First programme to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping, as argued in our report *Close to Home*.[35]

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34   Centre for Social Justice, 'Putting Down Roots: Improving Security for Renting Families and Private Landlords'
35   Centre for Social Justice, 'Close to Home: Delivering a National Housing First Programme in England'

Social relationships and community thriving

The themes of employment, low deprivation, and housing tenure are all factors associated with being able to build a stable presence in a local area, and having the time, means, and confidence to participate in the local community.

Just under half of all respondents said 'not feeling lonely or isolated from local people' is necessary to feel connected in the community. This rises to 68% among the over 75s. Whilst this need is clearly expressed, only 28% of people on average felt that their communities did not have loneliness and isolation. A higher proportion of young people than any other group felt that this issue had become worse in recent years.

In terms of assessing social relationships against our index metrics, there are few measures we can readily use at the constituency level which pertain directly to this issue. One indicator that is available is the number of people married in a community. Marriage is only one indicator among many other kinds of relationship, and so this picture is necessarily incomplete. However, it can be interpreted as an indicator of the ability of people to settle and put down roots in an area if they wish.

Using constituency-level data on marriage rates, we find a correlation between marriage and community strength. This is most evident at the extreme ends of the spectrum of marriage rates in each constituency. Where fewer than 30% of residents were married, community was much less strong, whereas where more than around 55% were married, communities tended to be among the strongest.

Marriage correlates with several other factors such as home ownership, age, and being at a stage in life where one wishes to settle in an area. This result should not therefore be taken simply in isolation. In addition, families with children – especially young children – are likely to be less mobile than single people both in the long and very short terms. That is, a family with several young children is more likely to need to stay within a smaller geographic area, and so will be likely to choose to live and participate in areas with good community facilities such as schools, sports clubs, and community groups.

There is some evidence that marriage increases social connectedness, although this picture is complex. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) points to a range of sources demonstrating a link between marriage and volunteering. "Marriage has been found to increase social contacts and networks, opening up opportunities to be asked to volunteer […]"[36] and offers a nuanced take on this, especially on gender differences and the effects of life events such as parenthood on volunteering opportunities.

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36   Stuart and NCVO, 'The links between family and volunteering: A review of the evidence'. (Quotation references the following citation: "Smith, D.H and Wang, L (2017) 'Conductive social roles and demographics influencing volunteering' in Horton Smith, D., Stebbins, R.A. and Grotz, J. (2017) *The Palgrave Handbook of Volunteering, Civic Participation and Nonprofit Associations*, Springer")

Figure 12: Marriage rates and percieved community strength

This result would appear to indicate that enabling people to develop family and wider social relationships is also supportive of community more broadly. This is plausible when compared with data on responsibility for community in the next section since, on average, across all factors assessed, families were attributed more responsibility for community thriving than were regional and national government.

Security of housing tenure and social relationships enable people to put down roots and feel a sense of connectedness in the community.

Policy area: Family Hubs

We recommend that measures to strengthen family relationships, such as providing Family Hubs, should be recognised as important for community thriving and should be rolled out, facilitated, and supported across the country.[37]

Family Hubs are friendly, accessible, community-based centres, providing families with necessary services and connecting them to further community resources and groups. These can be located in different community venues such as libraries and GP surgeries. Family Hubs would provide easy access to standard family services such as perinatal services and birth registration, childcare and early education, and parenting and relationship classes. Provision would also extend to employment and debt advice, mental health counselling, and substance abuse services.

Family Hubs have wide-ranging benefits. Co-locating as many services as possible would increase their impact and reduce their cost. Where services are needed but not provided by the local authority, family hubs would connect those in need of support with local charities and voluntary organisations equipped to provide it, building relationships between families and their community. An additional benefit of the Family Hub model would be increased usage of stigmatised services, such as drugs or abuse counselling, by locating them in the same place

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37   Centre for Social Justice, 'Why Family Matters: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Consequences of Family Breakdown'

as all other family services, such that users would not feel they could be singled out as, for example, 'troubled'. We are encouraged to note the support for the concept of family hubs in the recently produced government-sponsored report.[38]

Several of these Hubs already exist and we recommend the government draw on the insights of pre-existing research and practice to accelerate the nationwide rollout of Family Hubs and commend the work of the Family Hubs Network[39] in this respect. We encourage the Government to work with local charitable and voluntary sector organisations who will have a particularly strong grasp of local issues and nuances when providing services to families. This will ensure help is available to all more easily.

We welcome the recently created National Centre for Family Hubs and recommend the government invests more substantially to accelerate the rollout of Family Hubs in communities across the UK, and prioritise provision where needs are most acute. This is especially prescient because, in our data (see §2) "Support services for things like parental classes and counselling" was one of the policy areas ranked as most important but perceived as having low levels of provision.

3.2.4 Ethnicity and community

We can analyse the differences between responses of those from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic backgrounds as compared to all other respondents, and there are some differences which merit consideration. However, it is very important to bear several things in mind when looking at this demographic group.

Firstly, as we have argued previously, grouping respondents together as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic has clear limitations since it comprises very different groups of people.[40] Breaking our results down into smaller sub-categories would result in sample numbers that are too small for reliable analysis, and so this is the most feasible way, despite its limitations, to examine the distinctive responses of this demographic group.

Secondly, we must also bear in mind that the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic population of the UK is younger – on average – than the rest of the population.[41] This matters because, in our findings, the most clear differences in demographic group responses were between older and younger respondents. The differences between younger (under 35) and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic participants' responses were in general negligible (0–2% difference for the vast majority of responses), with no difference exceeding 8%. More research is therefore needed to examine the relationships between age and ethnicity in understanding data on community.

Overall, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents were 4% less positive on average about the strength of their local community across all factors and policy areas surveyed than the rest of the sample. By comparison, this gap is more than doubles in size when comparing older and younger (under 35 and over 65) respondents. Younger people were 9% less positive than older respondents.

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38   The Early Years Healthy Development Review, 'The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days'
39   'Family Hubs Network Website'
40   Centre for Social Justice, 'Facing the Facts: Ethnicity and Disadvantage in Britain. Disparities in Education, Work, and Family'.
41   Race Disparity Unit, Cabinet Office, 'Ethnicity Facts and Figures: Age Groups'.

One difference between Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic participants' answers and the rest of the sample centres around the theme of **inclusion and agency** – feeling included and able to be oneself in a local area. 'Feeling like I can be myself when in the local area' was a high priority for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents, being in the top six most important factors for a thriving community, whereas this was on average the tenth most important factor for the rest of the population. 11% fewer Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents felt they could be themselves in their local area as compared to other respondents, and 4% fewer felt they knew and were welcome in the community. 7% of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents felt that in recent years, they had lost a sense of being able to be themselves in their community.

A second theme is that of the **facilities** available locally. 5% fewer Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents felt their community had shared public spaces where people can meet and run into each other, such as parks, benches, or town squares, and 10% felt they had lost these in recent years.

A third theme is that Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents felt there was less **social support** available in their communities, with 11% fewer saying there were volunteer groups to help the vulnerable locally compared to other respondents. 8% more Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents said they felt, in recent years, that their community had lost the sense that people in their area would help them if they were going through a tough time. That said, on the issue of loneliness, 10% more Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents compared to others in the sample felt that in their community, if they have an issue with loneliness or an issue the community could help with, they could get help quickly.

Finally, there was a significant difference between Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents and others as regards the importance placed on neighbourhood security. As with younger people, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents were less concerned about anti-social behaviour and feeling comfortable to go or be anywhere in the local area; these were both in the top 5 factors for a strong community for the other respondents but were less strongly prioritised for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic respondents.

3.2.5 Age
Among the strongest differences in response to our poll were based along the lines of age. Overall, younger people tend to feel that their communities are less strong than do older people, but also place less importance across most factors for community thriving than do those in older age groups. Crucially, the factors that younger and older people prioritise differ, and this highlights the need for councils, community organisations, and all other actors to be sensitive to differing needs.

As can be seen below, areas with younger populations tend to be less satisfied with their communities:

Figure 13: Older age groups and percieved community strength
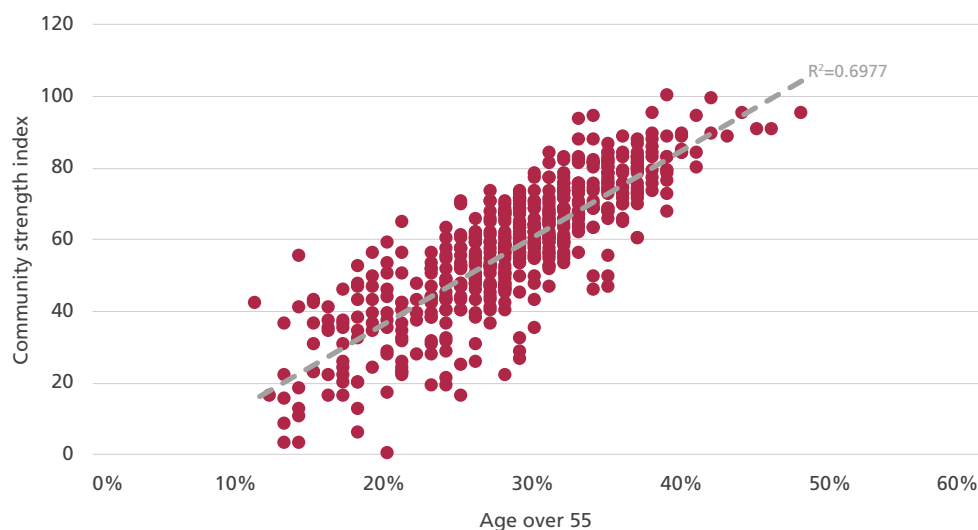
Source: Office for National Statistics; National Records of Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2016): 2011 Census aggregate data. UK Data Service (Edition: June 2016). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5257/census/aggregate-2011-1

Figure 14: Younger age groups and percieved community strength
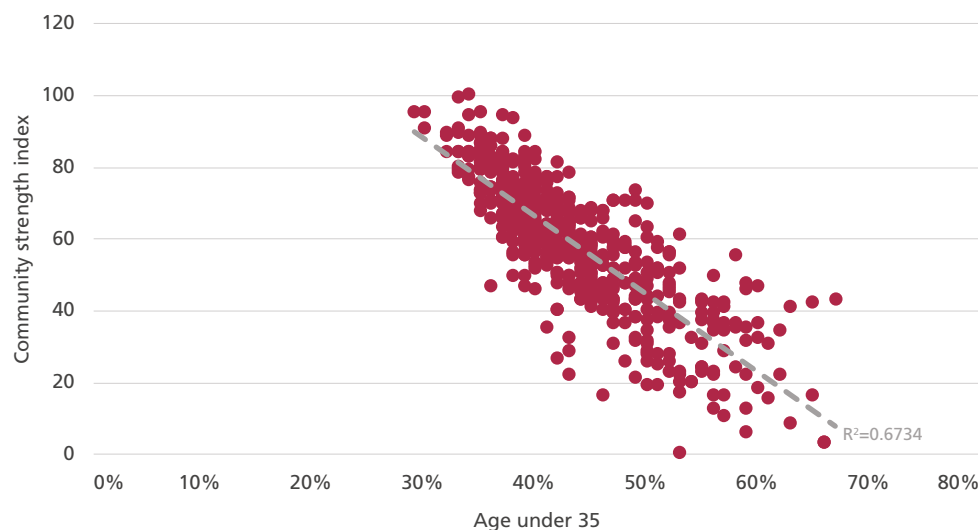
Source: Source: Office for National Statistics; National Records of Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2016): 2011 Census aggregate data. UK Data Service (Edition: June 2016). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5257/census/aggregate-2011-1

What might be underlying these differences? In one sense, these results are unsurprising. We have already shown that areas where there is more transience tend to have lower index scores of community strength. These areas have in general much younger populations. This should lead us to reflect on the differing needs of populations, and ask how younger people can better be supported in their communities.

Young people and community

The differences between younger and older respondents were very pronounced on many issues. One must also bear in mind particular caveats when looking at this demographic group. Importantly, it is not clear from a single survey as to whether these factors are to do with age or cohort, and thus whether differences will persist over time or change as people become older.

As noted above, younger respondents were 9% less positive on average about the strength of their communities – across all factors and policy areas surveyed – than older respondents. They are also significantly more likely to feel that their community has declined in recent years; across all factors, under 35s were on average 7% more likely to say their community had deteriorated in recent years. This is reflected in the mapping data; areas with higher proportions of young people – such as cities and places with strong student populations – are estimated to have less strong communities. In part, this might be expected given that younger people tend to relocate much more frequently.

As noted, there is considerable overlap between the distinctive responses of the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic subset and that of young people (under 35s). Many of the same themes apply here also. Indeed, when comparing younger with older respondents (over 65) the three themes of feeling a sense of agency and inclusion, provision of facilities, and availability all also apply.

In terms of **inclusion and agency**, younger people are much less likely to feel they can be themselves in the local area (60% in the oldest age bracket (over 75) felt this, whereas less than 30% of those aged under 35 did) and whereas more than 50% of over 65s felt they could be themselves in the local area, less than 40% of those in younger age groups (under 45) felt this.

In terms of **local facilities**, young people report a substantially lower sense that they have these such as community centres, libraries, open spaces such as squares, parks and sports or arts facilities. Young people felt there was less access to social spaces such as pubs and restaurants, and they felt access to nearby towns was more difficult.

In terms of **social support**, fewer younger people report a sense that people locally are willing to help with different issues, fewer report the sense that there are local charities or institutions available to support those in need, and fewer report the sense that in the community people are looking out for and helping each other, even if they don't know each other well. In relation to loneliness, however, younger people were the most likely group to say that if they had an issue with loneliness, or which the community could help with, it is possible to get help quickly.

A further theme – important to the youngest age category of 18–24 – is that of building **skills, experience, and employment opportunities**. This age group, somewhat more than any other, strongly agreed that local businesses should support local people by providing jobs, work experience, skills and training and strongly agreed that they would like more young people to establish their own local business or trade. Younger people's perceptions are somewhat less likely to reflect the view that their local community has access to services from organisations who can help with things like learning or starting

a business. Only 13% of those aged between 25 and 34 (and 85% of 18–34s) felt they could get advice on opportunities, business ideas, and financial advice in their local area – the lowest in the sample. This leaves 87% feeling they lack these.

Older age groups

In general, factors relating to physical security such as low levels of crime, feeling comfortable to go anywhere, and the absence of anti-social behaviour mattered much more to older than younger respondents. However, younger people were also much less likely to feel they live in a low crime area, feel comfortable to go or be anywhere in the community, and live in an area with an absence of anti-social behaviour.

For older age groups, interpersonal social connections, not feeling lonely, acts of kindness and generosity, checking in on neighbours, and looking out for others in the community mattered much more as indicators of community thriving. A thriving high street, the responsiveness of local government, public social gathering spaces, and publicly provided community facilities tended to matter more for older people than for younger people. Some of these factors may be because of the wider use of social networking for younger generations.

Furthermore, those in the older age groups were much more likely to be concerned about not feeling lonely or isolated from local people. Older respondents were also much less likely than younger people to feel that they could get help easily if they felt lonely.

chapter three

How and who can strengthen communities

Introductory remarks on policy recommendations

1. Responsibility for community: The role of each sector

The understanding of 'community' that became evident through our qualitative research emphasised the need for involvement among an interconnected web of people and organisations across all sectors in society to strengthen local community life.

This was reflected in our polling. We asked respondents to indicate which areas of each sector (Individuals, Families, Voluntary Groups and Charities, Local Government, Regional Government, National Government, Businesses, and Banks) they felt should hold responsibility for each of the factors that make a strong community (see Appendix A), as well as the range of community policy areas we asked about (see Appendix B).

The following table shows the average score of perceived responsibility:

Figure 15: Responsibility for community by sector
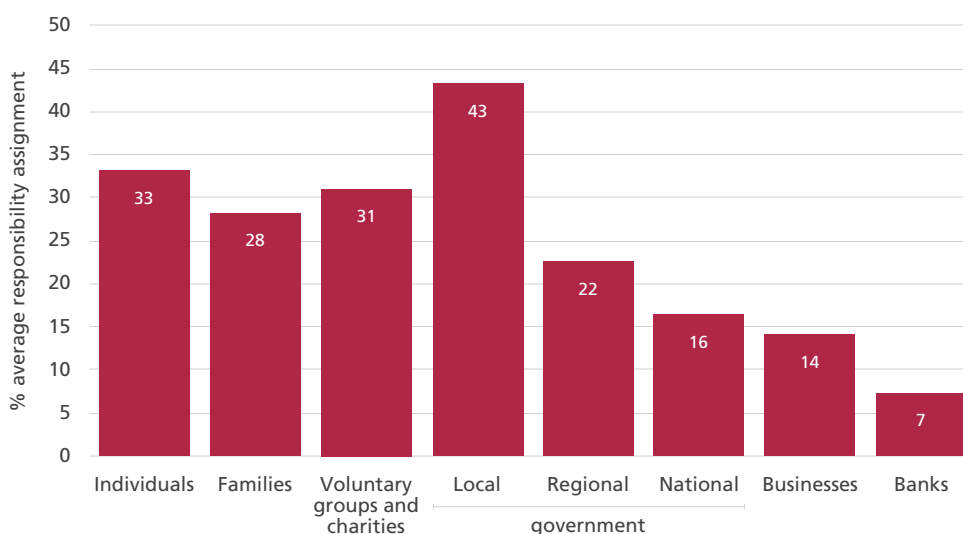
Of course, this differs from sector to sector and we take a look at each area below. At a glance, several overarching themes emerge.

- All areas of society were assigned some responsibility, and whilst some were assigned more responsibility than others, the distribution is relatively even, with no single area having an average score above 45%.

- The areas of responsibility assigned to each sector were, overall, quite different. Whilst in the grand scheme of things, the private sector was assigned less responsibility, there were nevertheless several points on which they were clearly assigned roles at much higher levels. For this reason, we examine each sector below.

- Individuals and families matter – people assigned considerable responsibility to individual and family-level action. This indicates that a very significant aspect of community-building is about the strength of social fabric from the bottom-up.

- The results point towards the *local*. As can be seen, local government was seen as holding more than double the responsibility across the range of community factors and policies than regional or national government (but not local government which was viewed as having the highest responsibility).

- The voluntary and charitable sector matters. This group was, on average, viewed as holding more responsibility than regional or national government.

a) Individuals and Families

Whilst policy aimed at strengthening "community" might focus exclusively on initiatives run by groups of people such as voluntary organisations, local government, and the private sector, our findings suggest that the public view individuals and families as having significant responsibility for building thriving communities.

Indeed, the highest single assignment of responsibility on any issue was to individuals, with 70% of respondents indicating that individuals have a responsibility for checking in on their neighbours. Close to half of all respondents felt this was necessary to feel connected in the community, and more than one fifth of said that they felt their community had lost this practice in recent years.

Following this, the highest assignments of responsibility for individuals were in the areas of cultivating a sense of pride in the local area (67%), looking out for and helping each other even if they don't know each other well (65%), and being able to help each other with different issues (65%).

Policy area: Tackling loneliness

Before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, there was already a widespread issue of loneliness in the UK.[42] Nearly three quarters (72%) of people felt loneliness and isolation were a problem in their community – with younger people in particular (20% of 18–24 year olds) saying the problem had gotten worse in recent years. This has been massively exacerbated by lockdowns. 'Relationship poverty' is a key national issue; the drive to 'build back better' will be meaningless if this does not include rebuilding social connectedness and reducing isolation. Furthermore, this should be recognised as a health issue.

Crucial to tackling loneliness is ensuring that all communities have properly designed and resourced facilities that enable and incentivise people to meet one another formally and informally. Many of these can be located in and around 'Hub Streets'. As Age UK point out, "Tackling loneliness requires more than social activities".[43] Furthermore, we recommend a broader rollout of social prescribing such that GPs and other medical professionals, where appropriate, are fully resourced to recommend social activities to help strengthen patients' overall wellbeing.

This depends upon strengthening the volunteering infrastructure digitally, but also requires people to link needs to those who cannot access or use digital resources. Family Hubs, libraries, and other local centres of social participation should be well-resourced to connect those in need for better social contact to one another and to organisations and initiatives they would enjoy. This includes schemes such as the 'Role Models Initiative' (featured below).

Families were assigned highest responsibility, broadly speaking, for the same kinds of area as individuals with the exception of the highest score for the importance of knowing and feeling welcomed in the local area at 60%. This may reflect the fact that families are seen as social units through which people often become acquainted with a local area, and may be associated with a social unity through which neighbourliness towards others are often extended.

Overall, individuals and families are considered to hold strong social and civic responsibilities predominantly for factors relating to cultivating connection and belonging. This is especially important since more than a quarter of respondents said they felt their community had lost a sense of pride in the local area in recent years. In addition, the informal and interpersonal nature of 'looking out for one another' is perhaps why people view individuals and families as having the potential for making an impact in this area. In other words, we can all make a difference!

This demonstrates that policymakers should not overlook the importance of individual actions and horizontal, informal community connections.

Indeed, this is corroborated by findings in the study of social capital. A well-connected local community where people of different backgrounds are able to take part in a social network enables serendipitous transfers of opportunity and information. This can be shown through a simple illustration:

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42   The ONS reported that "In 2016 to 2017, there were 5% of adults in England who reported feeling lonely "often" or "always". Loneliness – What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely? www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesare associatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10

43   Age UK, 'All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life', 8. Their report points out that insecurity caused by crime in the neighbourhood, money worries, poor public facilities (such as public toilets), and other issues contribute to loneliness.

Suppose Anna, a local swimming team member, has an issue with litter her street. She mentions this in passing to Bob, who knows Charlotte – a local litter pick organiser. Bob is able to mention Anna's concerns to Charlotte who helps resolve the problem.

The jump of information from the swimming club to the litter picking team takes place entirely through a friendship that is not framed by a group at all. On large scale, this enables a fantastically rapid flow of information and opportunities through the community. It shows that the benefits of interpersonal relationships can extend well beyond their constituent parties and bring opportunity and cohesiveness to a community.

As such, we recommend policies that recognise the centrality and vitality of individual agency and relationships within the community, and engender personal responsibility and a sense of the common good to achieve this. This is all the more pressing since our data found that only 30% of respondents feel that people in their area would help them during a difficult time, and close to a fifth feel their community has lost this sentiment in recent years. Among young people (under 35) this rises to more than a quarter.

Policy area: Role Models Initiatives

A commendable example of such a policy is the 'Role Models Initiative' set up by Nick Fletcher, MP for Don Valley. This identified an opportunity to pair young people with mentors by working with, and alongside, local community groups. The programme seeks to build character through cross-generational links and exchanges to strengthen communities. This has been developed in the Don Valley in association with local Chambers of Commerce. It shows strongly promising results in building social capital and linking young people to opportunities, whilst helping develop a sense of civic participation and social responsibility from a young age. We recommend that funding be made available from existing Levelling-Up funds to support the rollout of similar such programmes in other local areas.[44]

b) Charitable and Voluntary Organisations

Our qualitative research found that, on the whole, people viewed the involvement of volunteers and charitable organisations in the provision of social support, such as through debt advice, addiction support, and care for the elderly, vulnerable, and lonely, as very positive. This was not merely down to a matter of fiscal efficiency, but most fundamentally a question of the relationships of trust that such organisations and initiatives sustain and create.

Several features of such organisations support this view.

Firstly, small organisations are often more agile than large, nationally run institutions. The nimble nature of these groups has been invaluable as they have been formed or have adapted rapidly to changing circumstances and needs during the pandemic.

Secondly, such organisations are also able to draw upon local cultural knowledge in operating and communicating effectively to those they serve.

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44   Centre for Social Justice, 'Role Models Initiative'

Thirdly, the involvement of volunteers often enables the building of relational trust among recipients of social support. Rather than having a transactional relationship with recipients of support, the kindness shown by volunteers and non-profit organisations is often able to cultivate a unique form of trusting relationship. One participant in our qualitative research described this as exercising "power with" rather than "power over" those they serve.[45]

Policy area: Infrastructure for volunteering

The pandemic has driven innovation in online connection and led many charities, voluntary groups, and social enterprises to accelerate new forms of digital technology to link resources to needs. An example is the 'Deedmob' platform as used in Somerset which, as featured recently in the BBC, has led to a rise in volunteering locally.[46] These developments are very welcome, although this could be more productive with the development of national-level interlinkages between platforms for volunteering, charitable service provision, and philanthropy.

We support the recommendation for the 'Volunteer Passport' system proposed in Danny Kruger MP's *Levelling Up Our Communities* report.[47] Such a system would link supply and demand for volunteering through a major national digital database.

We also recommend that this be usable from the perspective of potential charitable service users, such that they can connect to organisations who could assist them with issues from mental health through to arts and sports opportunities. We would also recommend that this is used in schools once per year by young people as part of their PHSE course, such that they can find both volunteering opportunities and organisations that could assist them in meeting their needs and goals

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The highest average assignments of responsibility to charitable and voluntary groups were for charities and institutions for helping those in need (64%), volunteer groups to help the vulnerable (58%), community programmes to help with loneliness (56%) and volunteer groups for recreation activities (56%). When asked whether volunteer groups for helping the vulnerable and for recreational activities were necessary for their community to thrive, a clear majority (60% and 59% respectively) answered in the affirmative.

This chimes well with the qualitative research findings that voluntary and charity groups play a key role in community thriving and should be championed.

c) Government

Of all sectors examined by our quantitative research, local government received the highest average assignments of responsibility for enabling communities to thrive. Regional and national government were also assigned responsibility, but proportionally much lower. This indicates the importance placed on local government provision for enabling communities to thrive. Furthermore, the importance of government in fostering local community is underscored by the fact that the top four policy areas prioritised by our survey respondents either directly relate to structures of government or are typically associated with public provision. These are:

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45 This distinction was introduced by Mary Parker Follett. For more detail, see Follett, *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett*

46 Al-Yasiri, 'It Is so Easy to Choose What Voluntary Work to Do'

47 Kruger MP, 'Levelling up Our Communities: Proposals for a New Social Covenant', sec. The Volunteer Passport, p.28

- Making sure local government listens and acts on the things that matter to communities
- Changing government funding so it gets to the people who need it
- Providing more community hubs such as community centres, libraries or information desks
- Providing more public open spaces such as squares, parks, and sports or arts facilities

As indicated below, different levels of government (local, regional, national) are seen as holding responsibility for different policy areas, although understandably there is some overlap.

Policy area: Public services, education and community

Schools are vital points of connection between the community and families. Parental engagement has a proven role in student success. Our recent polling, to be released separately soon, finds that in the primary sector most teachers feel they proactively build positive relationships with parents. However, in the secondary sector, this falls to less than half. In this polling, just 40 per cent of headteachers and senior leadership team (SLT) members said their schools had a clear, coherent parental/carer engagement policy. We recommend that all schools be resourced to develop such policies where possible and cooperate with Family Hubs to provide support services where helpful.

Furthermore, on the issue of mental health, we agree with the Children's Commissioner's recent report highlighting the need for NHS mental health funds to be invested more in local community organisations rather than trying to recruit and train 'an entire new workforce' (p.9) and that better data should be collected and made available on mental health service provision from charity and voluntary sector organisations (p.5).[48]

3.3.1 Local government

In addition to receiving the highest average responsibility attribution in our survey, the most highly prioritised policy area in the ranking was "Making sure local government listens and acts on the things that matter to communities". 63% of survey respondents agreed that this is necessary for community thriving in their area, whilst only 35% felt this was true where they live. This leaves a considerable gap in attainment between expectations and performance in local government. In general, responsibility for this was overwhelmingly placed on local government, although older respondents tended to stress this more strongly than younger age groups.

The policy areas for which local government is seen as most responsible reflect a concern for security and connection:

- Safety precautions like well-lit streets 68%
- Having clear contact details for the people to contact in local government if there are issues within my community 66%
- Providing more public open spaces such as squares, parks, and sports or arts facilities 65%
- Providing more community hubs such as community centres, libraries or information desks 65%

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48   Children's Commissioner and Longfield OBE, 'The State of Children's Mental Health Services'

Three of the above key areas of responsibility concern the provision of facilities. The fact that precautions for public safety come top of this list further highlights the importance of security for enabling communities to thrive. In addition, local government was seen as holding strong responsibility for providing public social spaces such as community hubs and open spaces. This underscores the role of government as a provider of facilities that catalyse relationships which enable communities to thrive.

In addition, the importance of a thriving high street came through clearly; 43% of respondents said a thriving high street is necessary for a strong local community, but less than a quarter (20%) felt this was currently true in their area. Whilst one might think this is an issue regarding business and the private sector, people overwhelmingly saw local government as bearing the key responsibility for it.

Policy area: From high streets to 'Hub Streets'

The 'decline of the high street' is a well-known phenomenon in the UK, having taken place over a long period in which out-of-town shopping and online retail have reduced demand on the high street. Recent Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures reveal that "High street retail employment fell in more than three-quarters of local authorities between 2015 and 2018".[49] The coronavirus pandemic has driven up online retail dramatically and this will doubtless affect in-person retail.[50] Declining high streets need to be addressed urgently as our data shows that a thriving high street is very strongly prioritised by respondents but is also seen as not present in communities. Furthermore, our data shows that people view local government as holding primary responsibility for improving the high street.

In 2019, we recommended 're-imaging high streets from the bottom up'.[51] This, we now argue, should take the form of 'Hub Streets'. These would not just be centres for retail, but also for other vital community amenities. As historic 'anchor stores' (such as department stores and major supermarkets) move away from high street locations, we recommend that these physical spaces could be transformed into highly impactful community assets such as:

- Family Hubs
- co-working spaces
- enterprise hubs
- health clubs and wellbeing centres
- community arts performance spaces
- community centres
- places of worship (and/or community centres run by them)
- youth centres
- spaces for continuing education/extra curricular activities,
- nursery/childcare facilities, and so forth.

This would be excellent for restoring a sense of pride around dilapidated town centres. Furthermore, this is *not* a turn away from retail, but will *support* retail by increasing footfall and local activity. As the recent ONS statistics clearly show, those towns recognised as 'hub towns' (where local services are available in the same place) have performed better in terms of retail than the rest of the country; "Hub towns' high streets have retained more of a retail focus than other places, being composed of 36% retail addresses, compared with 29% in Great Britain overall".[52]

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49   'High Streets in Great Britain: March, 2020'
50   OECD, 'E-Commerce in the Times of COVID-19'
51   Centre for Social Justice and Sinclair, 'Community Capital: How Purposeful Participation Empowers Humans to Flourish', 8
52   'High Streets in Great Britain: March, 2020'

Another way to increase footfall on high streets is to enable the conversion of some commercial space to residential accommodation. We would not recommend the conversion of shop fronts and ground floors to residential accommodation, but would recommend the development of flats above where possible. That said, it is imperative that such conversions provide quality places to live in. "Permitted Development" must require that investors develop properties in such a way that future residents have sufficient living space, light, and other amenities for the mental and physical wellbeing of them and their families.

Finally, we strongly encourage councils to support the development of 'Hub Streets' as a cultural asset to their communities and to be innovative in their endeavours, e.g. by encouraging trial or 'popup' projects. As Historic England point out, high streets must be seen as an "experience" in which people want to spend time and which can serve as a source of local pride.[53]

In addition to providing facilities, government – at all levels – is unique as a locus for democratic, political decision making and community leadership. The importance of accountability and communication is clear at the local level from the emphasis placed on having contact details in local government for issues in one's area as well as the importance placed on having a local government that listens and acts on the community's needs. On this subject, whilst directly elected mayors have been a live topic during the course of the pandemic, our survey did not indicate them as a priority – indeed, this was the lowest ranked of all community policies in our poll.

Policy area: Having a voice through local government engagement

Parish Council-level representation provides a vital, highly local level of democratic accountability and decision-making. We support key recommendations made by the National Association of Local Councils in their *Prospectus for Ultra Localism*,[54] including the call for "reforming the community governance review process with a community right of appeal, and use of referendums" (p.5) as well as rolling out a national support program to help parish councillors make the most of their roles.

We furthermore recommend that opportunities for engaging with local councils are actively promoted by them and made available more widely, for example through the wider use of working groups on local issues (as some people want to engage on single issues, e.g. the environment) and through youth councils. Finally, we recommend that parish councils seek to inform residents through newsletters and other such publications. This is especially important when many locally-run newspapers have been lost.

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53 'Researching High Street Heritage Action Zones'
54 National Association of Local Councils, 'A Prospectus for Ultra-Localism: Working with Government to Help Communities Help Themselves'

3.3.2 Regional government

By contrast with local government, regional government was attributed considerably less responsibility for community-related issues. Whilst "regional" may mean different things in different contexts – such as metropolitan authorities or nationally devolved powers – this finding suggests that people prefer decisions relating to provision for their community to be taken as close to home as feasibly possible.

The following policy areas were attributed the highest levels of responsibility to regional government. Two of these are shared with the top four mentioned above for local government.

- Living in a low crime area 46%
- Safety precautions like well-lit streets 44%
- Providing cheaper access to nearby towns through public transport or easy parking 43%
- Providing more public open spaces such as squares, parks, and sports or arts facilities 43%

Policy area: Championing community-friendly urban design

We support the principles building places that have greenery, are well-connected, are beautiful, and are mostly at 'human scale' height – as championed by the organisation Create Streets.[55] We further support their recommendations for making streets more walkable, and thus more sustainable and liveable, without being too tightly packed. We support building and transforming places to create small green spaces and 'pocket parks' in which people can gather and spend time and feel refreshed.[56] We would also encourage the use of building materials that encourage a sense of place – the feeling that one "couldn't be anywhere" – for example, though the use of materials that reference those in existing historic buildings.[57]

The importance of safety is clear, with regional government being seen as responsible for both ensuring low levels of crime and public safety precautions. This may be because police forces and police and crime commissioners are coordinated regionally rather than directly by local governments.

Furthermore, regional governments are seen as responsible for providing infrastructure that connects local areas, and also for the provision of infrastructure such as recreational facilities and green spaces.

On the question of local transport, in general, provision appears to keep up with demand, with 55% of people saying 'affordable access to nearby towns through public transport or easy parking' is necessary for communities to thrive, and 54% felt they currently had this. However, there is an acute disparity among residents of mostly rural areas, with only 35% saying they have access to this currently. We welcome efforts to improve local public transport infrastructure and connectivity, such as the expansion of cycling routes, metro services, and the re-opening of closed rail lines as part of levelling-up schemes and local development efforts as in, for example, Manchester, Birmingham, London, and further afield.

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55 Boys Smith and Create Streets, 'Love Thy Neighbourhood: The Create Streets Community Guide to Creating Happy, Healthy Places'
56 Boys Smith, 'A Direct Planning Revolution for London?'
57 Boys Smith

Policy area: Community and criminal justice

As noted in our analysis above, neighbourhood safety and security is a major priority for a great many people in the UK. Security is a foundation upon which connection and belonging can thrive. We believe that there is a reparative role that can be played through criminal sentencing.

As we recently recommended in our report *Sentencing in the Dock*, we advocate for "the introduction of a new custodial sentence for the criminal courts, the Intensive Control and Rehabilitation Order (ICRO). This new sentence would be served wholly in the community using Electronic Monitoring, curfew requirements and regular periodic reviews before the court. The availability of new technology in the market means that we can go further than ever before in seeking new alternatives to custody, while safeguarding the public and commanding the confidence of sentencers. We consider that it is only by enabling individuals to remain in the community, that meaningful rehabilitation can be achieved".[58]

3.3.3 National government

Again, national government received overall lower rates of responsibility assignment than local or regional government. This continues the theme of community-related issues being seen as the responsibility of levels of government closer to where decisions are taken.

However, some of the top areas of responsibility for national government were not present at the top of the statistics for local and regional government. These key areas are:

- Creating tax incentives for people to support local community groups 48%
- Changing government funding so it gets to the people who need it 47%
- Living in a low crime area 41%

Again, the theme of safety comes through with ensuring low levels of crime being seen as a priority matter for national government to tackle. In addition, the fiscal and financial role of national government comes through as a clear theme. This chimes well with the push towards funding for levelling-up, and the importance of this for strengthening community life.

The policy area of 'changing government funding so it gets to the people who need it' is of course an easy policy to agree with, and unsurprisingly found widespread support in our poll. However, notable is the major discrepancy between the extent to which people believe this is necessary (56%) and the extent to which people feel this is currently true (24%): a difference of almost a third of all respondents. Likewise, fewer respondents (25%) felt that the tax system encouraged giving to local causes than those (48%) who felt that this is necessary. A positive way to improve this, as discussed, may be to commission more from local charities who local people are likely to recognise as serving those who are most in need of support. We furthermore recommend that the government examine whether greater tax relief can be offered for donations to local community projects in addition to that offered to businesses and individuals through Gift Aid

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58   Centre for Social Justice, 'Sentencing in the Dock: The Case for a New Sentence in the Criminal Courts of England and Wales', 9

Whilst this came up as a top responsibility area for national government (47%), local government was seen as holding more responsibility for this area overall (50%) and this may indicate that the national government should seek to implement policies which ensure accountability, responsiveness and efficiency in the use of public funds at the local level.

Policy area: Match trading

We support the initiative recommended by the School for Social Entrepreneurs to implement 'match trading' as a funding model for social enterprises, and enterprises more broadly where grant funding would be of significant benefit to the community. As opposed to traditional lump-sum grants being awarded in one go – which runs the risk of creating dependency and dramatic fluctuations in revenue – match trading enables businesses to receive contributions based on their level of trading. This enables supporting funds to be delivered more organically, and creates motivation and energy among entrepreneurs, staff, customers, and community stakeholders.

The efficacy of this is promising, as they put it, "Social impact organisations incentivised by a Match Trading grant are increasing their income from trading at 2.5 times the pace of those supported by a traditional grant."[59] We recommend that government and private sector organisations explore options for rolling this out on a broader scale, especially in areas with local economies most in need of strengthening.

d) The private sector

When thinking of community, one might not typically emphasise the role of the private sector. However, our qualitative research demonstrated the vital role businesses play in strengthening local communities in a variety of ways. This includes enterprises that provide services and meeting spaces for community groups to use, as well as supporting good causes in their area through corporate volunteering and charitable giving.

Furthermore, many businesses are themselves communities of employees, families, and stakeholders. In some cases, major local industries and employers will form a very significant part of the local community. In addition, banking and financial services also provide support for community assets and initiatives.

Overall, the private sector did not receive as high average levels of responsibility attribution for the community issues we examined, but, once again, the results point to some distinct responsibilities attributed to commercial organisations.

1. Businesses
The highest attributions of responsibility to businesses were the following:

- Having businesses help support local organisations if they are facing any kind of financial difficulty (46%)
- Having businesses provide social gathering places for the community (44%)
- Having businesses volunteer within the community to help local groups meet their goals effectively (43%)

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59   School for Social Entrepreneurs, 'Match Trading'

These three areas would indicate people expect the private sector both to contribute to the community through their core areas of business (such as businesses that offer gathering places) and through social action and corporate social responsibility – including through donating to local good causes and volunteering in the community. As can be seen, the private sector is an enabler and facilitator of community life.

Our polling suggests that businesses using their core activity to provide community spaces and facilities is working quite well in some areas. For example, whilst 56% of people felt that places to gather socially such as pubs and restaurants are necessary for community to flourish, in fact *more* people felt they had access to this – 59%. On this point, there was a notable age group differential; in general older respondents were more likely to indicate that their community had more of this, but also were more likely to feel that this is necessary.

Policy area: Corporate volunteering

Several times a year, skilled professionals are often offered the chance to engage in their communities and make a meaningful difference through employer-supported volunteering (ESV). These are days when employees are given paid time off to volunteer during their work hours, and they can choose where they spend this time.

This has the potential to be hugely beneficial for local voluntary organisations, but we heard that corporate volunteers are often not aware of opportunities to use their technical and professional skills in serving good causes. Furthermore, these schemes are often highly underutilised by staff. Charities will benefit more if companies encourage staff to volunteer for organisations that need their skills.

We recommend that, where possible, businesses invest in the digital infrastructure necessary for finding volunteering opportunities that fit their skills, and that staff are rewarded and recognised (perhaps through an award scheme, bonus, additional day of leave, etc) for making full and efficient use of the ESV scheme. This will create positive ripple effects by creating cross-sector linkages between local businesses and charities.

That said, when we asked about businesses providing social spaces in general (without reference to pubs or restaurants), 35% of people felt that this was necessary, whereas only 25% felt that this was present in their area. This may suggest that there is some scope for businesses to provide social meeting places other than those focused on food and drink – for example, co-working spaces. 11% more people said co-working facilities were necessary for their community to thrive as compared to those who felt they were available in their area.

However, there are also areas for potential improvement where this is possible; In terms of giving financially, some of our polling reveals that whilst 43% of people feel businesses should support local organisations if they are facing any kind of financial difficulty, just 26% feel that this happens in their area. In the most rural areas, this figure falls to just 16%. In addition, in our qualitative research, some charities described the importance of corporate volunteering programmes being used to encourage employees to offer their unique skills to charities.

Furthermore, as discussed above, the importance of thriving high streets came through as a clear theme, but was interestingly viewed as overwhelmingly the responsibility of local government. However, cooperation with the private sector to facilitate thriving Hub Streets going forward will clearly be necessary.

In the most rural areas, this issue appears to be particularly acute with only 8% of respondents suggesting they have a thriving high street. There may be potential for new facilities – and especially in rural areas – such as co-working spaces to breathe life into high streets. In rural areas, this was particularly acute, with just 5% of respondents saying co-working facilities were available.

With the rise of more remote working, we envisage that these could be a helpful way of cultivating community life and discuss this further below; 53% of respondents said that they expect to spend more time living and working in their local area as a result of Covid. 51% of people said they have used local businesses, trades and services more since Covid began, and 55% said that whatever the future holds, they plan to continue using local businesses and trades more than they did pre-covid.

In addition to their roles as service providers and supporters of community causes, we must not overlook the vital role of businesses as employers. This is both because the presence of jobs brings prosperity and vitality to an area, and also because workplaces can be communities in themselves, and so help strengthen the wider community. Employers too can play their part in recognising their responsibilities to promote this – e.g. by facilitating communal meeting places for workers, and when considering terms and conditions of employment. 70% of respondents to our poll agreed that local businesses should endeavour, where possible, to support local people by providing jobs, work experience, skills and training. As our previous research has demonstrated,[60] businesses can be vital places for young people to build social, professional, and commercial skills. Indeed, 55% of our respondents said that they would like more young people to establish their own business or trade.

2. Banks
Our poll found that the highest levels of responsibility attributed to banks were for the following factors and policy areas:

- Having banks and other financial institutions guarantee loans or certain income streams for local groups (42%)
- Creating services from organisations like banks or post offices to help with things like learning or starting a business (31%)
- Having a place to get advice on opportunities, business ideas, and financial advice (25%)
- Creating places where local people can be supported in starting a business (24%)

Banks were, on average, attributed the lowest levels of responsibility of all sectors. This is perhaps because financial service providers are not generally seen as central community organisations. However, our research through engagement with NatWest's Regional

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60   Centre for Social Justice and Sinclair, 'Community Capital: How Purposeful Participation Empowers Humans to Flourish'

Boards has demonstrated the many ways in which banks can do this. Of these top areas of responsibility, the clear role for banks is for providing both financial services as well as advice relevant to financial services and business in the community.

The most highly-prioritised area is in 'guaranteeing loans or income streams for local groups'. This is of course a very broad area. We found interesting examples of community capital organisations whose purpose was to help subsidise and de-risk loans for community projects so that investments in local areas can be made more easily. Whilst 48% of people think this is necessary for community thriving, only 23% feel it is happening, meaning around a quarter of all respondents (24%) think there is much more to be done here. We believe there is broad scope for innovation in this area in the future.

In addition to using financial capital resources, banks also have considerable human and social capital in knowing the community and being able to provide advice and support to businesses and other organisations. As three of the other top areas of responsibility demonstrate, people also viewed banks as having a role for helping people with financial advice and fostering environments for entrepreneurs to grow businesses.

When it comes to 'having a place to get advice on opportunities, business ideas, and financial advice', only around half of the people who felt this was necessary for their community also said this was available currently in their locality. In our qualitative research with NatWest's Enterpreneur Accelerators, we found that entrepreneurs very much value a community in which they can experience a sense of security, connection, and belonging through a network of supportive relationships with other entrepreneurs, business leaders and financial experts. This is particularly pertinent as they are taking on considerable levels of personal risk to develop their businesses.

Expanding this kind of service at the local level would be valuable as a way to foster local innovation and employment. Whilst banks were viewed as responsible for it, other sectors were also viewed as holding considerable responsibility (including government, businesses, and voluntary groups) which suggests that coordination and cooperation in this area is vital. For example, organisations such as chambers of commerce provide links between businesses, but also links into communities for the private sector.

The top areas of responsibility for banks also indicate that they should build relational support for stakeholders in the community. As many financial services become digital, it is important that people are able to have relationships with financiers who can support them and their community roles.

Finally, home ownership tends to correlate with strength in communities and therefore banks, as providers of mortgages, can be considered as playing a vital roles in the long-term strength of community life.

Appendices

Appendix A: Factors for community thriving

These are ordered here in terms of overall priority using a 'maxdiff' prioritisation analysis from our survey. Those at the top were the most highly prioritised factors by our respondents.

- Living in a low crime area
- Feeling comfortable to go or be anywhere in a local area
- The absence of antisocial behaviour
- People looking out for and helping each other, even if they don't know each other well
- People being willing to help each other with different issues
- Safety precautions like well-lit streets
- People checking in on their neighbours
- Knowing and feeling welcomed in the local area
- Feeling like people in my area would help me if I was going through a tough time
- Not feeling lonely or isolated from local people
- Having shared public spaces where people can meet and run into each other, such as parks, benches, or town squares
- Feeling like I can be myself when in the local area
- Having a united local community with no serious divisions
- A sense of pride in the local area
- Feeling like I can live a valued and fulfilling life in my community
- Groups in my area that help protect me and my family (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch)
- Being part of a wide network of people that I feel I have something in common with
- Having local charities or institutions that help people in need
- Having clubs or groups that give people in my community things to do together
- Having a sense of local identity connected to the heritage and past of the place I live
- Regularly meeting different types of people in my local area
- Knowing a large number of people in the area
- Growing up in, or having strong roots in, the local area

Appendix B: Policy areas for community thriving

These are ordered here in terms of overall priority using a 'maxdiff' prioritisation analysis from our survey. Those at the top were the most highly prioritised policies by our respondents.

- Making sure local government listens and acts on the things that matter to communities
- Changing government funding so it gets to the people who need it
- Providing more community hubs such as community centres, libraries or information desks
- Providing more public open spaces such as squares, parks, and sports or arts facilities
- Creating volunteer groups to help the vulnerable
- Having community programmes to help with loneliness
- Creating local community groups that are based in and around the centre of the community
- Policies to create a thriving high street
- Having clear contact details for people to contact in local government if there are issues within my community
- Support for places to gather socially such as pubs, or restaurants and entertainment venues
- Providing cheaper access to nearby towns through public transport or easy parking
- Creating locally accessible support services, including for things like counselling or parental classes
- Creating a central list with good and clear information about locally available voluntary and community groups
- Having officially recognised community leaders who can organise the community's resources and direction
- Having businesses help support local organisations if they are facing any kind of financial difficulty
- Having a place to get advice on opportunities, business ideas, and financial advice.
- Finding it easier to get to know people in nearby streets and neighbourhoods
- Creating volunteer groups for recreation activities
- Creating incentive systems for young people to volunteer
- Creating places where local people can be supported in starting a business
- Training local public servants to help charities and other community groups
- Having businesses volunteer within the community to help local groups meet their goals effectively
- Creating tax incentives for people to support local community groups
- Creating services from organisations like banks or post offices to help with things like learning or starting a business
- Having banks and other financial institutions guarantee loans or certain income streams for local groups
- Having businesses provide social gathering places for the community
- Having more local co-working facilities
- Creating online local groups such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups
- Having the opportunity to directly elect a local mayor

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